Capturing and making sense of everyday news use

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Capturing and making sense of everyday news use

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

> "Cultures" do not hold still for their portraits. Attempts to make them do so always involve simplification and exclusion, selection of a temporal focus, the construction of a particular self-other relationship, and the imposition or negotiation of a power relationship.
>
> *(Clifford, 1986: 10)*

On the face of it, journalism and Journalism Studies have witnessed a shift toward the users[1] of news. Long characterized by a separation between editorial and commercial departments and by extension between journalists and their audiences (Costera Meijer, 2003; Gans, 1979; Schlesinger, 1978), financial constraints and technological innovations have both forced and enabled journalists to pay more attention to news users (Anderson, 2011; Batsell, 2015; Cornia, Sehl & Nielsen, 2018). Not coincidentally, in recent years, news users have also piqued the interest of journalism scholars, who had traditionally been more concerned with news production and products (Bird, 2011; Hartley, 2008; Picone et al., 2015). However, although news users have taken center stage in discussions about journalism, they have yet to get a seat at the table. That is, while they form the underlying force behind many of the key issues and (scholarly) debates surrounding journalism – revenue models, mis- and disinformation, audience fragmentation, to name a few – news users are still more often spoken *about* rather than spoken *with* (Costera Meijer, 2013; Peters, 2012). As a result, we have comparatively little understanding of news use from an emic perspective (Pike, 1967; see also Swart, 2018): how news users *themselves* experience and make sense of their everyday news use. Their perspective is needed to arrive at a fuller understanding of (changing) news use, which, in turn, is essential because this understanding affects how news users are imagined, approached and engaged with by various actors, including journalists, scholars, educators and policymakers. The relevance of focusing on the mundane experiences of news users is reflected by the fact that the Consortium of Emerging Directions in Audience Research (CEDAR) – a network of early-career European audience researchers – recently selected "a renewed commitment to researching widespread and fundamental audience experiences such as reading, viewing, listening, and interpreting, also with regard to social, digital, and newer media" (Ytre-Arne & Das, 2019: 189) as one of their five priorities for audience research.

At least three trends within journalism studies sustain the relative neglect of an explicit user perspective. First, much research related to news audiences concerns studies of how news organizations and journalists imagine or engage with their audiences (e.g., Ferrer-Conill & Tandoc, 2018; Loosen & Schmidt, 2012; Nelson, 2018),

1 Although this dissertation sometimes uses the terms "user" and "audience(s)" interchangeably, as a rule it prefers "user" when referring to those engaging with news. The term allows for the inclusion of a wide range of (dimensions related to) news use, such as different media and platforms and different user practices (Picone, 2016).

rather than vice versa. Second, despite a recent increase in studies focusing on how people experience and make sense of their news use (e.g., Kümpel, 2019; Swart, 2018; Toff & Nielsen, 2018; Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2018), journalism studies is still dominated by approaches that methodologically isolate and abstract (Morley, 1992) news use from its embeddedness in everyday life, allowing for (cross-)comparison but in effect necessarily stripping everyday news user practices of their very idiosyncrasies. Third, relatedly, research into news audiences increasingly uses data collected by the news industry itself, namely audience metrics such as page views, time spent, shares, etc. The digitalization of journalism has enabled news organizations to measure and quantify aspects of their audience's behavior previously out of their reach (Napoli, 2011). Napoli (2011) uses the term "rationalization of audience understanding" (11) to refer to how:

> "[...] over time media industries' perceptions of their audience have become increasingly scientific and increasingly data-driven, with more impressionistic or instinctive approaches to audience understanding increasingly falling by the wayside. The days of [editors] making decisions based on their own subjective assessments of what will succeed and what will fail have largely been replaced by a decision-making environment driven by a wide range of analyses of audience tastes, preferences, and historical behavioral patterns."

Schrøder (2019: 165) puts the impact of audience metrics into perspective by arguing that news users' "inconspicuous everyday acts" such as clicking are "one formative force alongside the technological, aesthetic, and institutional forces that shape the media institution at the highest level." Still, while ethnographic and interview-based studies have shown that journalists do continue to take their professional judgment and their normative ideals seriously (Karlsson et al., 2013; Nelson & Tandoc, 2018; Welbers et al., 2016), there has been an undeniable (if uneven) trend toward "measurable journalism" (Carlson, 2018). It is therefore worthwhile to consider the extent to which such audience data capture and reflect people's everyday news use. In the quote above, the rationalization of audience understanding suggests that 1) metrics capture the tastes, preferences and usage patterns of audiences, and 2) because of their scientific and data-informed nature, metrics are more objective than previously available approaches. However, metrics are a "discursive construct" (Ang, 1991), an "institutionalized audience" (Napoli, 2011) that is constructed and measured in and on the terms of the industry's stakeholders, such as news organizations, advertisers, measurement agencies and platform owners (see also van Dijck, 2013b). As a result, so Napoli (2011: 170) argues, research using these data reflects "established conceptualizations of the audience," rather than contribute to a fuller understanding of actual news users. Ang (1991) even

goes as far as to suggest that our limited understanding of audiences is *because* of its being "colonized" by "the institutional view of the audience" which "silences actual audiences" (2). As Livingstone (2018: 177) asks ironically, "if data reveal what people 'really' do on and through digital media, why talk to them anymore?" While there are certainly limits to people's introspective capacities and abilities to self-report (Prior, 2009; Rosenstein & Grant, 1997), it seems worthwhile to critically assess metrics by exploring what exactly is (or is not) being measured, and by looking at the real people behind these discursive constructs.

This dissertation seeks to understand news users explicitly in and on their own terms, from their own vantage point. In doing so, it fits within a recent shift in journalism studies that puts the user first (e.g., Costera Meijer, 2006; 2013; 2016; Peters, 2012; Picone et al., 2015; Swart, 2018). Specifically, following Costera Meijer (2006; 2013; 2016), it takes people's *experience* as point of departure. Where she uses experience as a heuristic device that is more revealing about people's actual news use than their views or opinions (Costera Meijer, 2006; 2013), this dissertation also takes a closer look at the methodological and epistemological implications of taking 'experience' as point of departure for studying everyday news use. Its central question is deceptively simple: **How can people's experiences of news use be captured, and how can these experiences help make sense of everyday news use?** Following Costera Meijer (2016)'s suggestions for practicing audience research, this dissertation draws inspiration from Tracy (2010), who uses, first, the notion of "requisite variety" (Ashby, 1956) to refer to "the need for a tool or instrument to be *at least* as complex, flexible, and multifaceted as the phenomena being studied" (841, emphasis in original). Various creative methodologies will therefore be used and developed to capture a wide range of dimensions related to everyday news use. Second, using Ellingson's (2008) idea of "crystallization", Tracy (2010) describes the goal of (qualitative) research as "not to provide researchers with a more valid singular truth, but to open up a more complex, in-depth, but still thoroughly partial, understanding of the issue" (844). Rather than aiming to arrive at a unified audience theory, this dissertation seeks to make sense of and do justice to the messiness and contradictions of everyday news use in all its complexity.

Journalism's understanding of audiences

Before making the case for studying everyday news use via users' experiences, I will first discuss the recent attention news users have gained in journalism and journalism studies and what this has meant for audience understanding. This relatively recent interest in news audiences is no coincidence. Although it has become somewhat of a cliché for audience researchers to begin their work with the observation that the media landscape

is rapidly changing, it is hard to overstate the transformation the news ecosystem has undergone in the past decade or so. Argued from the perspective of the user, these changes boil down to increases in two forms of agency: choice and control (Napoli, 2011). First, today, users have a practically unlimited amount of options for news use. If before it was conceivable for people to more or less 'finish' the news of the day by reading a couple of newspapers and watching and listening the day's bulletins, today – with search engines and social media at their fingertips – they have instant access to more news and information than they could consume in their lifetime. Second, if before people were largely dependent on set news production and distribution schedules, today they have more control over when, where and how to consume news. The combination of portable devices, increasing internet speed and expanding data plans, and the disintegration of news content into individually consumable pieces enables people to use news any place and any time. They can also engage with content more actively, including liking, sharing, commenting and even contributing to or producing news.

For news organizations these new forms of user agency create challenges. From a production perspective, people's ability to use news on their own terms means that their attention can no longer be taken for granted. Indeed, while the available options for news use continue to grow, users' attention remains finite, making attention a highly coveted and competed over resource (Webster, 2014; Stroud, 2017). In order to succeed in the attention economy (Davenport & Beck, 2001; Goldhaber, 1997), news organizations must first attract and then measure the attention of users. This quest for attention is a zero-sum game: any attention a news organization does not capture will go to its competitors. As a result, it is not only ad-supported news outlets that seek to maximize the number of eyeballs they attract; subscription-based news organizations, too, must prevent their subscribers' attention from going to their competitors. Even public news organizations must justify their use of public money by proving their ability to reach significant parts of the public (Hanusch, 2017; Karlsson et al. 2013).

What follows is a media ecosystem in which news organizations are on the hunt for users' attention. Broadly speaking, we might divide their strategies for attracting and maintaining attention into those focused on the content, the form, and the distribution of news. Content and form strategies play into what (news organizations believe their) audiences want. The former includes personalization (allowing users to tailor news to their own preferences) and soft news (e.g. entertainment, human interest stories), while form strategies include a sensational or narrative style (e.g. clickbait, exemplars). Distribution strategies center on delivering news to where the audience is, e.g. through social media, newsletters, and push notifications. Whether such strategies are successful is typically measured through audience metrics such as ratings, clicks and time spent. As noted above, these metrics are not neutral: they represent the – often

strategic and economic – interests of the different players involved (Ang; 1991; Napoli, 2011; Webster, 2014). Nonetheless, they are often seen — or at least used – by both journalism professionals and scholars as representing the actual experiences, interests or preferences of users. This is not inconsequential. First, metrics are typically used to predict which content will attract further attention, and these predictions in turn affect the subsequent behavior of both news professionals and news users (Webster, 2014). Webster (2014: 92-93) captures this strikingly in the following quote:

> A forecast doesn't change the weather. Predicting we're going to get an inch of rain doesn't make it so. And if it does rain, you can measure the accuracy of your prediction. All you have to do is go to the rain gauge to know whether you got it right. The social world doesn't always play by the same rules. Predictions about social activity can affect the thing they're predicting.

Research has shown how user behavior as measured in metrics like clicks impacts journalistic practices, including news selection, news presentation and news placement (Tandoc, 2015; Nelson & Tandoc, 2018; Welbers et al., 2016). Metrics also impact subsequent *user* behavior: popularity indicators on news websites (e.g. "most viewed") affect selection choices (Knobloch-Westerwick et al. 2005; Yang, 2016). In other words, the "institutionalized audience" (Napoli, 2011) consequently impacts the behavior of real users.

A second reason metrics are not inconsequential – more to the point of this dissertation – is that they evoke or contribute to a certain understanding of news audiences. Most notably, clicking patterns have been taken as evidence that users are mostly interested in junk news (Tenenboim and Cohen, 2015; Tewksbury, 2003). As a Dutch research report concluded in no uncertain terms: "If it's up to the internet public their interests consist of news about crime and entertainment and famous people […] [They] want 'sex murder on horror holiday'" (Ruigrok et al., 2013). However, the potential problems of metrics as measure of news use are well-illustrated by Swedish research that compared news consumption on the same news website using both pageviews and time spent. Whereas news related to the public sphere made up just 9% of pageviews, it accounted for 20% of the time spent on the website (von Krogh & Andersson, 2016). It is easy to imagine how these results fit into a respectively pessimistic and optimistic portrait of news users and their interests. This begs the question: what exactly do metrics measure? Do clicks, for instance, capture users' interests or are they – as Chartbeat CEO Tony Haile (2013) suggested – "a measure of the provocativeness of link copy"? Part of this dissertation, then, is to critically assess two dominant metrics in journalism and

journalism studies (clicks and time spent) by exploring what they mean from a user perspective.

Scholars' conceptions of news users: agency and activity

Following journalism professionals, scholars, too, have tried to make sense of how the digitalization of journalism has impacted news use. In order to make the case for taking people's experience of news use as point of departure, it is useful to briefly discuss how scholars have conceived of news audiences and what this means for our understanding of news use. These conceptions matters, as Picone (2016: 126) points out, for they "shape[.] the questions we want to find an answer to and, in turn, the methods that will allow us to find those answers".

Over the past decades, several concepts have been used to refer to news audiences, each embodying distinct emphases regarding their object of study. The overall trend in these conceptions is a progression from passive to active, reflecting both academic debates and developments in the media landscape. In the early 20th century, the audience was thought of in singular terms, as a homogeneous, mass public. The focus was on the effects mass (broadcast) media had on the overall population or – later – segments thereof. The metaphor of the hypodermic needle vividly evokes how the (passive) public was thought of as 'injected' with a message. This assumption of a passive public directly affected by mass media would soon be problematized by several other mass media scholars, through such notions as the "two-step-flow of communication" (Lazarsfeld et al. 1944) which holds that messages first flow from mass media to opinion leaders and *then* to the public, and "selective exposure" (e.g. Lazardsfeld et al. 1944) which holds that people tend to gravitate toward messages that align which their previously held beliefs and avoid those that do not. Still, the focus was on the effects (mass) media have on the public. This transmission model of communication thus sees communication as a linear process with a sender sending a (comprehensible) message to a receiver (Shannon & Weaver, 1949).

Subsequent approaches to audiences would focus more on the audience itself, specifically on how audience members were more *active* than was assumed in (early) media effects research. What these conceptions thus have in common is that they center around the notion of agency or activity. At least three dimensions of agency or activity can be distinguished, each more or less aligned with a different research paradigm: selection or choice, interpretation or meaning-making, and production or sharing (Picone, 2016; Webster, 2014). In the following section I will briefly discuss these different emphases on agency and what they have meant for research into news use.

Selection/choice

A first take on agency is the power of users to select or choose (Picone, 2016; Webster, 2016). This is exemplified by uses and gratifications theory (U&G) (Katz et al. 1973), which shifted focus from media effects' "What do the media do to the people?" to "What do people do with the media?" (Katz, 1959; see also Katz et al. 1973). A functional approach to media use, U&G imagines individuals as making conscious and deliberate choices, actively seeking media for specific (and knowable) needs, such as surveillance, diversion, personal relationships and personal identity (McQuail, Blumler & Brown, 1972). It is still a go-to for media scholars, particularly those interested in mapping people's motives for using newer (social) platforms such as Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat (Alhabash & Ma, 2017; Papacharissi & Mendelson, 2010; Phua, Jin & Kim, 2017; Sheldon & Bryant, 2016). Although Abercrombie & Longhurst (1988), following Hall (1982), group media effects and U&G together in the "behavioural paradigm", as both traditions are essentially concerned with the effects media have on audiences, there is a marked difference between the two in terms of the agency attributed to audience members.

The proliferation of news media and platforms in the digital age has also led researchers to study how people *combine* different media. Media repertoire analysis looks at how people navigate and make sense of the ever-diversifying media landscape by selecting and creating their own relatively stable "constellation" (Couldry et al. 2007) of media that they use (Hasebrink & Popp, 2006). Similarly, Schrøder's (2015) "agency-oriented" (62) notion of "worthwhileness" looks at how people select media from the "supermarket of news", making a "worthwhileness equation" (63) of such dimensions as price, time spent, and normative pressures. Here, the term "(media) user" is typically used, reflecting a focus on individuals' active role in putting together their media repertoire or diet, as well as being a more practical (and perhaps more accurate) term for referring to the different media or platforms individuals might use (Picone, 2016).

Interpretation/meaning-making

A second take on agency centers on interpretation and meaning-making (Picone, 2016; Webster, 2014). These emphases fit within what Abercrombie & Longhurst (1998) have named the incorporation/resistance paradigm. Typically referred to as reception research, the turn to people's interpretative and meaning-making practices was a reaction to U&G's lack of attention to users' sense-making of their media and the humanities' ignoring of real audiences (Livingstone, 2013; Schrøder, 2019). Indeed, it was a corrective to the dominance of text-centered studies, and emphasized that media texts are polysemic (Fiske, 1986) since audiences do not necessarily interpret texts as intended and not all audiences interpret texts in the same way. The paradigm is exemplified by Hall's (1973) encoding/decoding model, which argues that audience

members, depending on their social position, can decode texts in three ways: dominant-hegemonic, negotiated and oppositional. These positions were later empirically tested by Morley's (1980) classic qualitative (interview-based) study *The Nationwide Audience* (see also Kim, 2004). Reception studies would gradually shift from mostly interview-based qualitative studies of texts to ethnographic case studies that emphasized the functions of media (Alasuutari, 1999), such as Lull's (1980) study of the social uses of television. Later, reception studies would 'zoom out' even more, seeking to grasp the role media played in people's everyday life (Alasuutari, 1999; see Schrøder (2012) for an alternative account of five stages of reception studies). Examples of the latter include books by Bird (2003) and Madianou (2005), which seek to understand how people make meaning through everyday media use.

In addition to texts, audience activity in the form of interpretation and meaning-making can also be applied to how users make sense of news media and platforms (cf. Picone, 2016). Especially fitting with Abercrombie & Longhurst's (1998) notion of "incorporation/resistance", "domestication theory" describes how people adopt and integrate media technologies into their everyday life (Silverstone et al., 1992; Silverstone, 1994). If early reception research was a corrective to text-centrism, domestication theory was a reaction to technological determinism (Silverstone, 2006). Both emphasize users' agency in interpreting and giving meaning to media, whether text and technology.

Producing/sharing

A third form of agency focuses on the productive activities of news users. The digitalization of journalism made it possible for users to (more easily) disseminate, contribute to or even create their own content. In other words, the line between the more passive consumers and the more active producers has become blurry, as reflected in such terms as "produser" (Bruns, 2007). In what she calls the "participation paradigm", Livingstone (2013) argues that "the concept of the participatory audience is more social than that of the active audience", in the sense that they contribute to "something larger than themselves" (p. 25). While initially the participatory audience led to scholars' "enthusiasm about new democratic opportunities", this soon made way for "disappointment with news users' passivity" (Borger et al., 2013). Also relevant here is what Abercrombie & Longhurst (1998) have called the "performative" paradigm, which foregrounds identity and describes how "[b]eing a member of an audience becomes a mundane event" (37). This is especially applicable to social media use. Research shows that users are aware of how their productive activities such as sharing and discussing news are more or less public and adjust their behavior accordingly (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015). Recently, there has even been a shift toward (what is experienced as) more 'private' social platforms like WhatsApp (Swart et al., 2018).

What a focus on agency/activity overlooks

It is clear that agency/activity has been a fruitful lens through which to study news use, especially as the media landscape became increasingly characterized by user choice and control. The notion's flexibility helps account for a broad spectrum of user activities, from less active (passive reception) to more active (content creation) (Picone, 2016). Yet, as I will argue below, the notion of news users as more or less active has also led to certain questions *not* being asked. Importantly, this is not to say that these questions are incompatible with the notion of the active user per se; rather, this conception prioritizes certain dimensions of news use while tending to overlook others.

My first concern is that a focus on user activity – naturally – tends to lead to a focus on what users are (or are not) *doing*. News users' activities are often dealt with in what could be called an on/off-approach, where the main criterion is whether the activity is present or absent. In other words, activities (or practices) are seen as countable. Useful about counting and categorizing acts of news use is that it allows for comparison and for keeping track of changes in the media landscape. However, there is a danger of essentializing people based on their activities alone, without understanding or taking into account the *experiential qualities* 'within' and 'without' these practices. Rothbart & Taylor (1992) describe essentialist thinking as "a tendency to infer deep essential qualities on the basis of surface appearance, a tendency to treat even independent categories as if they were mutually exclusive, and a tendency to imbue even arbitrary categorizations with deep meaning" (12). In regards to news use, it becomes problematic when categorized and counted user activities form the defining characteristic from which conclusions (or assumptions) are then made about news use or news users. The clearest example is metrics: a news user's action is either registered or not (e.g. they either click or they do not); there is no in-between. Based on these registrations – representing a single dimension of people's news use – inferences are then made about their interests and preferences. This on/off logic is understandably prevalent within the news industry: user activity (clicking, buying, sharing) generates income or attention, the lack of activity typically does not. However, from an academic (and a democratic) perspective, it is important that the experiences behind such metrics are explored, in order to better understand their meaning. What do they actually measure?

The on/off-logic is also inherent in the media repertoire approach (Hasebrink & Popp, 2006), which categorizes people based on whether or how often they use a medium. This, too, is most fruitful for making sense of how people navigate and select media in an oversaturated media environment. Where it becomes potentially problematic is when people are essentialized based solely on their 'use' being present or absent, without the 'experiential qualities' of these categories being taken into account.

An example is the category of news avoider. While existing statistically (Ksiazek et al., 2010), this category conceals as much as it reveals if not supplemented with insight into *how* and *why* people avoid news. For instance, Toff & Palmer (2018) complemented quantitative research identifying correlations between gender gaps in news use and structural inequalities (e.g. Benesch, 2012), by interviewing news avoiders to get a sense of "what those dynamics feel like on the ground" (p. 12). They found, for instance, that those who invested their time and energy into caretaking had little left for news consumption (Toff & Palmer, 2018). This is a valuable addition to an on/off-approach, adding necessary depth and nuance to the statistical category of 'news avoider'. Not only does it offer potential routes for intervention, but it also raises the question of whether news avoidance is an accurate or appropriate term for the experience described above. The point here, then, is that in addition to focusing on the doing or not doing of an activity (i.e. measuring and mapping news use), it is useful to also understand how and why people do (or do not) engage in news practices and what this means to them. Activities cannot be taken at face value; people's experiences of them should be taken into account.

My second concern is that a focus on agency/activity sees people as deliberate and rational. This is true for the U&G paradigm, but also for media repertoires analysis (see the notion of "worthwhileness equation" (Schrøder, 2015: 63)). The idea of "rational choice" has long been problematized. Webster (2014: 27) points out the assumptions behind it:

> First, each individual has settled preferences and knows how his or her choices will contribute to personal well-being or 'utility'. [...] Second, there is one objective reality that decision makers fully and accurately perceive. Third, decision makers have unlimited computational power to determine which of the available choices will best maximize their utility.

This conception of users shapes research into news use in two ways. First, it privileges what news users *themselves* are aware of and consequently excludes what they do not know or recognize. As our lives become more and more mediatized – and we live "in" rather than "with" media (Deuze, 2011) – the question to what extent users can oversee and report their own news habits and use becomes increasingly urgent. What has journalism studies failed to grasp about news use because research has depended mostly on users' own ability to account for and make sense of their news use?

Secondly, relatedly, the notion of deliberate, rational users tends to overlook the way people's use and preferences are *shaped* by structures beyond their perception (Webster, 2014). These include everyday structures such as daily routines but also the

media environment itself. As Morley (2006: 115) notes, "we should recognize that the consumer's ability to choose options from within a preset menu is a very limited form of power, compared to that of the institutions that construct those menus". For instance, when Costera Meijer (2016) found that young people in 2014 had a broader conception of what they considered (quality) news than their counterparts a decade earlier, this raised the question of whether this reflected a change in young people's perception of quality journalism or a change in the range of topics (quality) news organizations cover. Which 'shaped' dimensions of news use have we overlooked by focusing on agency?

Again, the point is not that scholars using a notion of active users are not aware of its limitations (see e.g., Bird, 2003; Yuan, 2011). Rather, the point is that a focus on deliberate, rational activities almost automatically leads one to *not* focus on subconscious and non-deliberate dimensions. Indeed, the fact that scholars point this out as a limitation of their own research suggests that it is not easily overcome (otherwise they would have done so).

My third concern with agency/activity is that it privileges cognitive dimensions of news use. In addition to the points Webster (2014) raised about rational choice, this is also true for interpretation: the focus here is typically on whether and how people understand messages, and less on other experiential dimensions of using news. In particular, affective dimensions of news use tend to be overlooked, at least in terms of the affective quality of the experience. For instance, although uses and gratifications approaches do include categories such as 'entertainment', affect here is approached as a desired or an achieved gratification. What this overlooks, is what is it *like* to use news. Which other (non-cognitive) dimensions of news use have been overlooked by a preoccupation with cognition?

To summarize, in order to arrive at a more complex and comprehensive understanding of everyday news use, three interventions are necessary:

1 From assumptions about news users to understanding news users in and on their own terms;
2 From categorizing and quantifying what news users do to understanding what it feels like to (not) use news;
3 From a focus on cognition to including other (experiential) dimensions of news.

Set-up of dissertation

This dissertation contains the following chapters:

Chapter 2 is a methodological chapter that makes the case for taking experience as point of departure for researching everyday news use. It critically reflects upon three interview-based methods that center around users' experience of news use – the think-aloud protocol, watching and discussing news, and the two-sided video-ethnography – and discusses their theoretical, methodological and epistemological implications.

Chapter 3 explores the extent to which news users are interested in tailoring news (use) to their own preferences. Tailor-made news here refers to news that is used on-demand, (explicitly) personalized and used in a productive manner (e.g., commenting, sharing). For this case study commissioned by Dutch public broadcaster NOS Nieuws, an inventory was first made of options NOS offers its users for tailor-made news. Next, five NOS professionals were interviewed about their aims and policies regarding tailor-made news. The heart of the study consists of interviews with 24 news users, aimed at establishing their desire for and experience of tailor-made news. The interviews consisted of several elements, including the day-in-the-life method, the think-aloud protocol, sensory ethnography, ranking exercises and a creative assignment that let informants build their ideal news website using cards. Finally, the results from the interviews were checked through a small survey (N=270).

Chapter 4 critically assesses the metric 'clicks' by exploring why news users do or do not click on online news. Point of departure is the assumption scholars and journalists tend to make about the correspondence between clicking patterns and users' interests in or preferences for news. Using the think-aloud protocol, informants (N=54) were asked to browse news on their computer/laptop, tablet or smartphone as they normally would and to say out loud the steps they took and the thoughts they had. Focusing on people's real-time, instantaneous experience of news, the aim was to arrive at people's considerations for clicking or not clicking, and to see how these relate to their (lack of) interest in news.

Chapter 5 delves deeper into users' experience of news content, using two Dutch current affairs TV shows as case studies. It explores under which circumstances viewers consider TV news to be captivating; that is, when they find news both interesting enough to watch *and* judge it as quality news. Informants (N=56) were shown video clips and immediately afterward were interviewed about their experience of each clip. Because the clips included various topics and storytelling techniques, informants were able to describe in detail which forms they did and did not consider to be captivating.

Chapter 6 starts from the idea that news users have limited insight into their own behavior. It also deals with a concern regarding the think-aloud protocol (chapter 4), namely that this method interrupts the flow of people's news use. In an effort to uncover hidden and unspoken dimensions of people's news use and to capture their news practices without interruption, a new method was developed: the two-sided video-ethnography. Thirteen informants were filmed in their own home, using news as they normally would. Their practices were recorded from two angles, in order to capture both the content of the news as well as their gestures, expressions and positions. Immediately afterward, these recordings were watched and discussed with each individual informant. After the researchers made sense of the data, the (initial) results were shared with the informants for additional feedback and insight. The method proved especially useful for capturing and making sense of sensory and material dimensions of people's news use.

Chapter 7 critically assesses a different metric: time spent. Using the data from chapters 4, 5, and 6, this chapter explores what spending time means from a user perspective. Similar to chapter 4, the point of departure is an implicit assumption – by both journalists and scholars – that more time spent on news use is inherently desirable. The chapter questions whether this is also true from a user perspective.

Chapter 8 concludes this dissertation by reflecting on its theoretical contributions, methodological and epistemological implications, social implications, practical recommendations, limitations, and suggestions for future research.

CHAPTER 2

Seeing, Thinking, Feeling: A critical reflection on interview-based methods for studying news use

A version of this chapter is currently under review:
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Introduction

Although when it comes to studying news use quantitative methods have dominated qualitative (Kümpel et al., 2015) and especially ethnographic (Bird, 2011; Hartley, 2008) methods, recently there has been an undeniable surge in qualitative, interview-based studies (e.g., Edgerly, 2017; Kümpel, 2019; Swart et al., 2018; Toff & Palmer, 2018; Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2018). Following Crang's (2002: 649) statements about a similar development in Human Geography a decade or so earlier, it could be argued that the time has come for news audience researchers to go "beyond simply championing or justifying qualitative methods" vis-à-vis quantitative methods and to be more reflective and critical regarding the limitations and possibilities of the qualitative interview.

The aim of this article is therefore to push forward thinking about qualitative interviews for studying news use, and to provide a useful resource to help journalism researchers looking to use a qualitative approach to study news use select an interview-based method suitable and appropriate for their particular research aims. Making the case for taking experience as point of departure for studying news use (Costera Meijer, 2006; 2013; 2016), the article explicates this notion by synthesizing four different theoretical perspectives on experience. On a more practical level, it also critically reflects on three interview-based methods that center around users' experience of news use – the think-aloud protocol, watching and discussing news, and the two-sided video-ethnography – and discusses their theoretical, methodological and epistemological implications.

Challenges of interviews for studying news use

Although the term 'experience' is often used in interview-based studies of news use, it is rarely explicated. Experience is typically used to refer to people's individual, subjective, lived experiences that are not directly accessible to researchers, and may be contrasted with "individual behavior" (Carù & Cova, 2008) which can be observed by 'external' researchers. The main question then becomes how to access these subjective experiences, for they can only be reached through people's expressions, which Bruner (1986: 9) describes as people's "articulations, formulations, and representations of their own experience" (see also Carù & Cova, 2008).

Before explicating the notion of experience, it is useful to consider some of the challenges that arise when using (qualitative) interviews to study people's experience of news use. First, there is the difficulty for people to access and verbalize their own internal state. Putting one's experiences into words requires not only substantial self-reflection but also significant narrative abilities: do they possess the vocabulary to express what is inside their mind? People also have trouble accurately self-reporting

their news use (Prior, 2009; Rosenstein & Grant, 1997), which becomes a more urgent problem in today's media environment in which people live not "with" but "in" media (Deuze, 2011). In a "media life" (Deuze, 2011), can people be expected to remember the news they use or encounter throughout their day, let alone the details of their experiences? Relatedly, people's expressions naturally only express dimensions of their experiences that they are consciously aware of, potentially excluding subtle aspects of news use – such as sensation and tactility – that do form part of people's experiences but are difficult to grasp and communicate. There is also the concern of social desirability: whether purposefully or not, people tend to tell stories to make themselves look or feel favorable, especially regarding a topic so normatively loaded as news use. Finally, since news and journalism play a dominant role in public discourse – not in the last place due to journalism's tendency to be self-referential (Kristensen & Mortensen, 2016) – there is the possibility that people draw from available, existing narratives about news to construct their own stories: "folk theories of journalism" (Nielsen, 2016a). While such stories are certainly informative about how people relate to journalism, they may tell us less about the details of their actual everyday news use.

Making the case for experience

The notion of experience could help overcome some of these challenges of the qualitative interview. In particular, four perspectives on experience can help explicate the notion and make it productive for studying news use. First, experience can be seen as something an individual has actually undergone or is undergoing (Tuan, 1977). What follows is that experiences might be more revealing about people's actual news use than their views or opinions (Costera Meijer, 2013). News, in particular, is a subject almost everyone has an opinion about. Langer (1998) uses the term "the lament" to refer to the oft-espoused criticism that television news has undermined journalism's primary role in liberal democracy – namely to inform citizens – by, essentially, moving toward entertainment. Research has shown that a similar refrain can be heard among news users, and yet this does not necessarily stop them from consuming said news (Costera Meijer, 2006). The question for interviews then becomes how to foreground not people's opinions but their actual experiences of news.

Second, experience is an inclusive concept that allows for a broad spectrum of dimensions related to people's news use to be included. Different dimensions are emphasized throughout the wide variety of definitions of experience. An example of an inclusive definition is Gentikow's (2005, in Ytre-Arne, 2011: 473) description of media experience:

> Experience encompasses practical encounters with facts and events of the world, physical and perceptual contact with people and things. Experiences are made primarily by our bodies and senses, are processed cognitively, are learned of, and result in skills, knowledge and values.

This definition of experience is helpful because it allows for a focus beyond what is most common within news use research – namely a focus on cognition and behavior – toward (among others) material, perceptual, aesthetic, emotional and communicative dimensions of news use (Gentikow, 2005, in Ytre-Arne, 2011). A similar but equally extensive definition is Gentile et al.'s (2007) notion of "consumer experience", which conceptually distinguishes between six experiential components: sensorial, emotional, cognitive, pragmatic (usability), lifestyle (values), and relational (social). The question then becomes how one can design an interview-based study that allows for multiple or all of these dimensions to (potentially) be included or touched upon.

Third, experience can refer to different modes of knowing. Tuan (1977) describes experience as follows:

> "[…] a cover-all term for the various modes through which a person knows and constructs a reality. These modes range from the more direct and passive senses of smell, taste, and touch, to active visual perception and the indirect mode of symbolization" (8).

These three 'modes' of experience may be called sensation, perception, conception (cf. Oakeshott, 1933). Applied to news use, sensation (feeling) would entail tactile and other sensory dimensions of news use, such as handling and navigating one's device. Perception (seeing) would refer to the becoming aware and processing of what users see right in front of them, including their first impression of and immediate reaction to content as well as the usability of a medium. Conception (thinking) would entail the more cognitive and symbolic dimensions such as understanding, sense-making, interpretation, evaluation and judgment of news content. Sensation has been particularly overlooked in studies of news use, even though material and sensory dimensions have been shown to impact people's experience of news and other types of media (Fortunati et al., 2015; Ytre-Arne, 2011; Zerba, 2011). Journalism scholars have consequently barely tapped into news users' embodied ways of knowing, which refers to knowledge people 'know' in and with their body but may not be able to communicate verbally (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Moores, 2015; Pink and Leder Mackley, 2013). A focus on sensation answers recent calls for non-representational approaches to media use (Couldry, 2012; Moores, 2012) as well as calls for (more) attention to haptic dimensions

of media use and affiliated embodied ways of knowing (Parisi et al., 2017; Richardson and Hjorth, 2017). However, as Paterson (2009) points out, overcoming the challenge of bridging "that gap between experiencing the feeling body and expressing it" (784) requires methodological innovation.

Fourth, the notion of experience allows for "temporal reflexivity" (Carlson & Lewis, 2018) regarding one's methodologies and their epistemological consequences. A useful source of inspiration here is Throop (2003), who in order to ensure that "experience is explored ethnographically throughout the entire range of its various articulations" calls for using methods that "differentially access both prereflective and reflective varieties of experience" (235). He builds upon Schrag's (1969) distinction between "granular" and "coherence" theories of experience, which view experience respectively as lacking or forming connection and consistency. Throop (2003) cites Turner's (1982) reading of German philosopher Wilhelm Dilthey's distinction between erleben, "the immediate 'living through of experience' as a sequence of events," and erlebnis, "the retrospective attribution of meaning tied to the structuring of 'experience' as a particular coherent form or unit" (Throop, 2003: 223). This distinction can serve as a starting point for a temporally reflexive methodological approach to capturing experience. Throop (2003: 235) argues for:

> [. . .] the importance of employing methodological strategies that complement the collection of explicitly retrospective assessments – in the form of the recollective meaning seeking that often emerges in the context of interviews, questionnaires and other forms of elicitation that depend upon those explicit reflective processes that tend to give coherence and definite form to experience – with strategies such as the video taping and/or systematic observation of everyday interaction that focuses upon capturing the often pre-reflective, real-time unfolding of social action.

Most interview-based studies of news use are retrospective: people are generally asked to reflect on their overall experience with news or to recount a past experience. One example is the day-in-the-life interview (e.g., Del Rio Carral, 2014; see also Chapter 3), which – applied to news use – starts with the following question: "Imagine: it's a weekday, your alarm goes off. What is the first moment you encounter news?", followed repeatedly by "What is the next moment you encounter news?" While a useful strategy to get an overall view of people's (perceived) news usage patterns, it faces some of the challenges of interview-based news use research mentioned earlier, such as having informants speak in (relative) generalities and misremember or forget details. As argued, foregrounding the notion of experience could help overcome these challenges.

It is at this point that the four perspectives on experience can be synthesized and used productively to make the case for three different interview-based methodologies suitable for studying news use: the think-aloud protocol, watching and discussing news, and the two-sided video-ethnography. Table 1 provides an overview of how the synthesis of the perspectives culminates in these three different approaches. These methods will be discussed and illustrated in detail in the sections that follow. First, the think-aloud protocol has a real-time orientation, aimed at capturing people's experience as they are undergoing it (erleben). The mode of knowing that is central here is perception: what informants see in the moment. Because of its focus on the here and now, the experiential dimensions of new use that this approach emphasizes (or privileges) are cognitive, emotional and pragmatic: what informants are currently cognitively processing, what they are feeling, and what they practically 'run' into (e.g., usability). Second, the approach of watching and discussing news has a retrospective orientation: informants reflect on an erlebnis, an experience they have already undergone. This can be tied to the mode of knowing conception, where experiences are (retrospectively) given "coherence and definite form" (Throop, 2003: 235). In terms of experiential dimensions of news use, this method gives access to not only cognition and emotion, but also values and relations, which refer respectively to people's moral evaluation of the news and how they situate themselves vis-à-vis (the people involved in) the news. Finally, in the two-sided video-ethnography, the two temporal orientations are combined, capturing both the undergoing and the having undergone of an experience. Because it captures the undergoing uninterruptedly – as will be explained in detail below – this approach gives access not only to perception and conception, but also to sensation: sensorial dimensions of news use such as touch. As such, this method captures the widest array of experiential dimensions. It should be emphasized that it is by no means impossible to access other experiential dimensions per method than the ones suggested here; rather, indicated are the dimensions of experience that, in the user studies that this articles draws from, were privileged or emphasized by using each of the methods.

Table 1. Three interview-based methodologies for studying news use

Methodology	Theoretical perspective on experience			
	Temporal organization	**Erleben/ erlebnis**	**Mode of knowing**	**Experiential dimensions accessed**
Think-aloud protocol	real-time	erleben (undergoing)	perception	cognitive emotional pragmatic
Watch & discuss	retrospective	erlebnis (having undergone)	conception	cognitive emotional lifestyle (values) relational
Two-sided video-ethnography	both	both	perception conception sensation	sensorial cognitive emotional pragmatic lifestyle (values) relational

In what follows, table 1 will be illustrated by critically reflecting on the use of these methodologies in the empirical studies that form the heart of this dissertation (see chapters 4-7).

Concurrent think-aloud protocol

As table 1 suggests, the aim of the first method is to have news users actively undergo something (*erleben*) in order to get insight into their real-time, in-the-moment experiences – into their "stream of consciousness" (James, 1890). The concurrent think-aloud protocol has participants think out loud while performing a task (Ericsson and Simon, 1993; van den Haak et al., 2003). This method was used in a study that explored why people do and do not click on online news (see chapter 4). Informants were asked to browse news on their own device of choice (smartphone, computer, laptop, tablet) as they normally would and to verbalize their thoughts, feelings and actions. The retrospective variant of the think-aloud protocol – in which informants comment on their experience after the fact – was tested as well, but it proved difficult for informants to remember the details of their browsing experiences. This was problematic because the study sought to capture people's instantaneous thoughts and immediate reactions.

While less appropriate for capturing informants' reflections about news (content) because thinking aloud impeded their processing of information, the concurrent think-aloud protocol proved most useful for capturing how informants browsed and navigated news as well as their considerations while doing so. Thirty distinct considerations

people had for clicking or not clicking on news were found, categorized into cognitive, affective and practical (see chapter 4). These considerations are similar to what Gentile et al. (2007) have classified as cognitive, emotional, and pragmatic components of consumer experiences. Other research using the concurrent think-aloud protocol to research online information seeking behavior has found similar categories (Branch, 2000; Macias et al. 2018).

A dilemma emerged when informants did not always comment on their non-clicking behavior. Since the study also explored why people do not click, a modification of the protocol was required. Informants often failed to comment on the headlines they skipped, because they decided whether or not to click very quickly. The decision was therefore made to occasionally interrupt them to ask why they did not click. An alternative would have been to record their browsing practices and watch and discuss these with the informants, but that likely would have caused them to forget their reasons for not clicking. It also would not have captured their initial, first impression of the news.

A criticism here could be that this interruption gave informants an opportunity to reflect and thus gave "coherence and definite form" (Throop, 2003: 235) to their experiences – which goes against the very aim of capturing their initial thoughts and gut reactions. This could also potentially have led them to measure their expressions (e.g., give socially desirable answers). However, informants were asked to comment on behavior they were in the middle of; if concerned with making themselves look favorable, this likely would have manifested in their browsing behavior itself rather than in their commentary on it. While it is certainly possible that this impacted the selection choices of some informants, the bluntness of their real-time commentary on why they did or did not click – e.g. not knowing what the words in a headline meant, or "drowning" in news about the Syrian Civil War – suggests that most informants were not primarily concerned with coming across as 'good citizens'. It could be argued that their being engaged in the experience (*erleben*) to a certain extent insulated them from imbuing this experience with meaning from beyond the activity at hand.

A second criticism could be that the interruptions disrupted the flow of people's news use. Indeed, as will be discussed later, this was the reason the two-sided video-ethnography combined a real-time and a retrospective approach by first capturing users' practices and then watching and discussing these with them. However, this combined approach risks losing the subtle, nuanced details that informants' real-time commentary captures. In fact, the video-ethnography showed that people have limited ability to recount the details of their news use, including which articles they had read, let alone why they quickly skipped over certain headlines. Somewhat interrupting the flow of their news use was therefore a necessary compromise to capture their concurrent thoughts and feelings. The main value of the concurrent think-aloud protocol, then,

is that it captures informants' first impressions while using news, making it especially useful for studying (first) encounters with (new) media and for capturing how users orient themselves and make sense of a media environment as they go.

As somewhat of a side note, the think-aloud protocol also appears suitable for 'checking' informants' statements in real-time. In a different study (see Chapter 3), one informant stated he would "absolutely" find it "delightful" if sports news no longer appeared on his news websites or apps. When he mentioned that such personalization was possible in the news app (Nu.nl) he used, and was asked to show how he had done so, the following exchange ensued:

> Interviewer: Mm-hmm, and did you do that?
> Informant: Hmm yeah, I've looked into it at least. […]
> Interviewer: Could you show me? Because it's [the app] on your phone.
> Informant: I'm not sure if I have this on Nu.nl. […] Before you were able to set up your favorite categories. (looks on phone)
> Interviewer: And did you set it up?
> Informant: Well that's not possible anymore […] so yeah, forget that whole remark, because I don't recall exactly how it was.
> Interviewer: But uh, if you could, you would gladly throw out sports.
> Informant: Yes yes yes yes yes yes.

Although this informant expressed enthusiasm for personalizing his news app, when going through the app in real-time he "admitted" he had not done so. In retrospect, this might be interpreted slightly differently: while the think-aloud protocol remains a suitable method for uncovering discrepancies between what informants *say they want* and *what they do*, rather than thinking of this in terms of 'checking' informants' statements, it is perhaps more useful to see such statements as expressing sincere desires that in their implementation are held back by obstacles. It then becomes the researcher's task to find out what these obstacles are. In this particular case, it was not worth the informant's effort to actually go in and change the settings.

Watching and discussing news

The aim of the second method is to have people reflect on a past experience (*erlebnis*) to obtain a more reflective perspective on their news use. As noted, most interview-based studies are retrospective, usually asking informants to reflect on their overall experience with news. This risks that while informants may tell (more or less) coherent stories, they might speak in generalities and misremember or forget details. In one study (see Groot

Kormelink and Costera Meijer, 2017), informants were therefore asked to reflect on an immediately prior news experience, so as to let them form more or less coherent thoughts while still being grounded in an actual and 'accessible' (i.e. rememberable) experience. Put simply, informants were given just enough time to process the news and reflect on it.

Taking current affairs TV as a case study, this study sought to move beyond viewers' opinion toward their experience of captivating political information. A challenge here was to get informants to talk about concrete elements in the news they might find captivating. During the think-aloud protocol in the previously mentioned study, several informants indicated that they found it hard to say their thoughts and considerations out loud while at the same time focus on reading news items and processing information. For the clicking study, the latter was not essential as the focus was on people's considerations for (not) clicking, not their engagement with or experience of the content itself. For this study centered around conception, however, commenting on news in real time was not an option. The approach chosen instead was to have informants first watch clips from current affairs TV shows and then immediately afterward interview them about their experience of these clips.

What proved essential was to include clips with a variety of content and narrative forms, in order to stimulate informants' "narrative production", which Holstein & Gubrium (2003: 75) define as "intentionally [provoking responses] by indicating—even suggesting—narrative positions, resources, orientations, and precedents". This approach enlarged informants' discursive space: being shown diverse clips gave them the tools to imagine and discuss concrete elements that would make for a captivating news item. It offered them a 'vocabulary' of concrete dimensions to refer to, enabling them not only to provide a considered, nuanced and normative evaluation of the items they watched but also suggest concrete suggestions for improvement (i.e., how to make the items more captivating).

What can therefore be concluded is that this retrospective approach grounded in an immediately preceding experience is a fruitful way to capture how people experience and make sense of news content and form (which in practice are usually not seen as separate by informants). The main finding of the study was that informants were able to distinguish between two viewing experiences: "enjoyment" and "appreciation" (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014; Oliver & Bartsch, 2010). Enjoyment is characterized by pleasure in the sense of fun and amusement and is associated with a lean-back viewing practice in which the news often functions as "background noise" or "companionship" (Lull, 1990), whereas appreciation is associated with concentrated, lean-forward viewing and is characterized by a willingness to invest time in exchange for gaining insight and learning new perspectives (an aha-experience) (see chapter 5). In terms of Gentile et al.'s

(2007) components of consumer experiences, this method thus captured cognitive and emotional dimensions of news use, as well as relational and lifestyle (value). The latter two refer to, respectively, how informants situated themselves vis-à-vis (people in) the news (e.g., politicians' talk being too abstract) and their moral judgments of the news and the journalists responsible for it (see chapter 5). Richardson et al. (2012) who had focus group participants discuss short political media clips reported similar categories.

A possible criticism here, too, is that informants gave socially desirable answers regarding what they should like to see in current affairs TV. This criticism can also be countered, first, by informants' frank 'admitting' of enjoying what they considered to be less quality news. Still, epistemologically, it is worth considering the truth status of their claims about wanting to see thought-provoking, knowledge-yielding items. One argument against doubting the sincerity of their claims is that their suggestions for making items captivating did not simply adhere to conventional standards of quality news (i.e. objective, neutral, balanced). Instead, informants provided detailed accounts of changes they would like to see and elements they appreciated, afforded by the variety of clips they watched which enlarged their discursive space. For instance, they said they wanted to have explained what exactly the Dutch States-Provincial [regional government] do and why that matters for their everyday life. If unconvinced by this argument, informants being able to differentiate between the experiences of enjoyment and appreciation is significant in itself: it indicates that – even if they do not do so in practice – they want themselves to watch thought-provoking, knowledge-yielding items. In other words, at the very least, this retrospective (but grounded in an immediately prior experience) approach is a fruitful way of understanding what people's ideal selves would watch. The next challenge then becomes to explore what holds them back from doing so and how they can be enabled to do so.

Two-sided video-ethnography

As suggested by table 1, the aim of the third method is to tap into people's embodied knowledge (sensation) by having them undergo something (*erleben*) without interruption and then have them reflect on this experience in retrospect (*erlebnis*). This should make less tangible dimensions of news use accessible and discussable. In a study that sought to capture news use more 'holistically' (see chapter 6), the main challenge was how to capture sensory, tactile dimensions of news use that informants themselves may not be aware of.

A method was needed that enabled informants to 'look in' and reflect on their own (uninterrupted) news use. To this end, the "two-sided video-ethnography" was developed. Tested first was video re-enactment, which has participants perform

activities on camera as they normally would and answer questions from the researcher, resulting in a collaborative understanding of the practices re-enacted (Pink and Leder Mackley, 2014). A benefit of this approach is that when the re-enactment diverges from "what is 'normally' done" (147), the informant can demonstrate what the practice would typically entail (e.g., "Usually I drink a cappuccino, but I ran out of coffee"). However, re-enactment interrupts the flow of the practice, because informants reflect and comment on activities they normally do more or less automatically. For instance, one informant scrolled through his Facebook-app rapidly, deciding whether or not to read news in a fraction of a second. Having him reflect on this would take out the speed that is so central to his Facebook experience. Second, while using news, informants used gestures to explain what they were doing, running counter to the aim of capturing their 'natural' news use and especially the sensory and tactile dimensions involved.

Instead, a method was developed based on Lahlou's (2011) Subjective Evidence-Based Ethnography (SEBE), which consists of three parts: a first-person capture recording of the activity, a "confrontation interview" with the informant, and discussing the analysis with the informant. However, this method was adapted for the specific purpose of uncovering hidden and unspoken dimensions of news use. First, informants were filmed from two sides while they used news in real time: a frontal perspective to capture informants' position, posture, gestures and expressions, and an over-the-shoulder perspective to capture the device and the content of the news they saw and used as well as their micro-gestures. Following Silverstone's (1994) notion of the double articulation of media as material objects and conveyors of meaningful messages, filming participants from two sides allowed for exploration of informants' engagement (or lack thereof) with news media as both texts and objects. An over-the-shoulder perspective was chosen instead of a wearable, first-person camera (e.g., Cordelois, 2010; Lahlou, 2011; Pink, 2015b) for two reasons: first, it was crucial to record the content of the medium clearly and stably, so it could be viewed and discussed with the informant. Second, participants' micro-gestures (swiping, flipping, etc.) also needed to be recorded. The latter is also why other elicitation techniques such as capturing screen data (e.g. Kümpel, 2019) were less useful for the aims of this particular study.

The next step was to watch and make sense of the videos with each informant individually. Rather than "confrontation interview" (Lahlou, 2011), the term viewing session is preferred here, as the session was imagined as a joint knowledge-constructing activity rather than an interview in which the informant is confronted with their own behavior. This term was also preferred over "reconstruction interview", subscribing to Pink's (2013) idea that a video does not take us "back" but rather "invites us to move forward with it and as such to make new knowledge as we engage with it" (107). The viewing sessions helped uncover hidden and unspoken dimensions of news use for two

reasons. First, they provided an uninterrupted view of the flow and the speed that are so characteristic of news practices like checking (Costera Meijer and Groot Kormelink, 2015). Second, most importantly, they made informants conscious of dimensions of their own news practices they were not aware of while they were undergoing the experience (*erleben*). It proved helpful for both researcher and informant to be able to pause or rewind the video during the viewing sessions, enabling informants to recall and comment upon the actions they performed. Looking 'in' on their own news use made them aware of embodied, subconscious and habitual dimensions and thus enabled discussion of them. Following the grounded theory method (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), discussions about the findings among researchers also proved helpful for making sense of the data. Finally, subscribing to the idea of a collaborative knowledge construction, the (initial) findings were shared with the informants for additional feedback and sense-making.

While fitting within the tradition of using elicitation techniques to help informants talk about their experiences, the two-sided video-ethnography's combination of capturing news use in real time (without interruption) with watching and reflecting on this use retrospectively makes it especially useful for capturing material and sensory dimensions of news use that users themselves (or researchers) are not aware of. A notable finding in the study was that people's handling and navigation of their devices and platforms impacted their experience of news in ways they themselves had not realized (see chapter 6). Results also showed the deep interconnectedness of different dimensions of news experiences. For instance, what might be called "measured avoidance" – which fits somewhere between the categories of news-seeking and news avoidance – refers to people's careful measuring of and slaloming around (negative) content to protect their frame of mind. One informant 'felt' her way through Facebook, her finger ready to scroll away if news hit her emotionally. Another skipped heavy content in her newspaper after the first pages to preserve her weekend mood. This notion of measured avoidance also adds to mood management theory (Zillmann, 1988), showing that the optimization of one's mood through content choices occurs at the most micro of levels – down to the scanning of words in a news item to establish its tone or valence – and is actively negotiated throughout one's news practice. Another example is the notion of place-making (Ingold, 2000; Pink, 2012; Tuan, 1977): how people create a sense of home through their news use. Two powerful illustrations of the interconnection between different dimension of experience are the informant who subscribed to a newspaper to recreate a sense of nostalgia but found herself struggling with the negative content, and the informant who simultaneously snacked news websites and watched a familiar TV show to create a comfortable atmosphere in which she was then comfortable consuming news (see chapter 6). The two-sided video-ethnography thus captured the

various components of Gentile et al.'s (2007) notion of experience: sensorial, emotional, cognitive, pragmatic, lifestyle, and relational dimensions of news use.

Epistemologically, this method makes previously 'hidden' knowledge visible and thus researchable. The strength of this approach is that it combines an emic and etic approach (Pike, 1967). It centers on the news user's experience while simultaneously enabling an outsider's perspective; indeed, in this study, informants themselves were both subject and observer. They gained insight into their own practices. A special added value of the two-sided video-ethnography – as compared to a screen capture method – is that it also captures tactile dimensions such as gestures which helped make sense of subtle aspects of their use that might not have been captured otherwise (e.g. the embodied sense of urgency during scrolling).

The two-sided video-ethnography also captured a different phenomenon that has methodological and epistemological implications: informants made sense of whatever information was presented to them. For instance, one informant declared he had skipped an article in his newspaper, but when the researcher pointed out that the video recording suggested otherwise, he 'corrected' his story by explaining why he had in fact read the article. This serves as a reminder that people are naturally inclined to come up with narratives (Gottschall, 2012; Heider & Simmel, 1944), in this case perfectly reasonable explanations for their own behavior. This has implications for all studies using elicitation techniques that 'confront' users with their own behavior. In particular, methods that capture less contextual details – e.g. logs of use – seem more likely to produce – to use Blackmore's (2017: 73) phrase – "plausible confabulations". The two-sided video-ethnography mitigates this risk somewhat by capturing news practices more holistically and by watching the recordings immediately afterward, making it easier to become aware of inconsistencies between the informants' recollection and/or expressions and the recorded practice.

Concluding remarks

This article has tried to push forward thinking about studying news use through qualitative interviews, by critically reflecting on the theoretical underpinnings, methodological design and epistemological implications of three interview-based approaches. One common thread that emerged from the different studies is that informants required assistance to be able to access and communicate their experiences of news use. The methods discussed each were successful at stimulating informants' "narrative production" (Holstein & Gubrium, 2003), respectively by having informants comment on what they saw right in front of them (see), by giving them the tools and the vocabulary to reflect on a prior experience (think), and by bringing them in touch

with their sensations of using news (feel). Table 1 summarizes which dimensions of experiences can be accessed and communicated through each of the three methods. This overview might serve as a resource for researchers to make well-considered decisions when using qualitative interviews to study news use.

It may tempting to conclude that of the three methods, the two-sided video-ethnography is the ideal method when studying news use, as due to its combination of a real-time and a retrospective orientation, it captures the widest range of dimensions, including sensorial experiences that may be difficult to capture otherwise. However, what is the ideal method is dependent on one's particular research aim, and there are certainly situations where either real-time or retrospective methods are more appropriate. For instance, real-time methods like the concurrent think-aloud protocol are more suitable when one is looking to capture people's instantaneous reactions (perception), such as the first impression of a newly subscribed to news medium or the perceived usability of a new product. Retrospective methods like watching and discussing news clips are more suitable when one is interested in capturing people's understanding or sense-making (conception) of news, as this approach foregrounds the content of the news (which may very well become secondary in the two-sided video-ethnography). In both cases, it is more useful to concentrate on these concrete aspects of news use rather than capture the widest array of experiential dimensions.

Throughout this article it was suggested that the healthy skepticism that (likely) characterizes most researchers' approach toward informants and their expressions, might be replaced by a different researcher-informant relationship. Rather than suspecting socially desirable answers produced to make informants look favorable, it might be more fruitful to view their expressions, if diverging from their actual everyday news practices, as manifestations of sincere desires, the realization of which is obstructed by certain obstacles. As Madianou (2009: 334) suggests, we might conceive of our informants as "people", which means they are complex beings full of contradictions, shaped by everyday (power) structures. Approaching informants as people means putting oneself – as the researcher – in the position of an enabler or facilitator, whose main responsibility is to make informants feel comfortable sharing their sometimes conflicting practices and desires. While certainly no guarantee to completely rule out social desirability bias, throughout the studies drawn from in this article, the following four very concrete, hands-on strategies appeared helpful in making informants feel at ease to share what might be considered 'less desirable' news behavior. First, in interviews it is essential to emphasize that it is the informant's own experience one is after, by underlining that anything they say is of value, regardless of how insignificant it may seem to them. One particular strategy that is most suitable as a warm-up exercise is the day-in-the-life method, mentioned earlier in this article: it puts informants at

easy to talk about themselves, since its questions are readily answerable and there are no right or wrong answers. Second, when explaining one's method of choice to the informant, it is useful to demonstrate it in a way that signals that (supposedly) less desirable news habits can safely be shared. For instance, while explaining the think-aloud protocol the researcher might share something revealing about their own news habits: "First I always scan the main headlines but to be honest then I usually then go straight to the media section." Third, careful follow-up questions are essential to help differentiate between informants' actual and desired news behavior. For instance, if an informant says they prefer a certain type of news, one could ask – depending on one's rapport with the informant – indirect questions like "Could you explain what you prefer about it?" or more direct ones such as "If you're being very realistic, how often do you actually consume this type of news?" and "Could you try to think of what stops you from consuming this type of news more regularly?" Finally, understanding news use from the user's perspective does not mean taking whatever they say at face value; it is essential to recognize the limits of their self-awareness. Methodologically, most helpful here might be the combination of retrospective and real-time approaches, which enables the informant to provide their perspective and share their experiences, while also becoming aware of the limits of their self-understanding. This allows for straightforward questions such as "You mentioned [this] but the recording shows [that]. Could you clarify?" Combining such emic and etic approaches could be an important move forward in capturing and making sense of everyday news use: it both values people's own expertise about their behavior and their experiences and complements this with an outsider's perspective which they themselves – together with the researcher – are also made part of. It must be emphasized that this should not end with a researching 'checking' informants' expressions but with a joint effort to make sense of their behavior and their experiences.

While this article has focused on methods for studying news use, its insights may also be relevant for other areas of journalism studies, such as news production. In particular, while real-time methods such as newsroom ethnographies and retrospective methods like reconstruction interviews (Reich, 2009) are common, approaches that combine the two – such as the two-sided video-ethnography – could be a relevant addition to ethnographic fieldwork, potentially revealing subtle (embodied) dimensions of news work difficult to capture through other interview methods.

CHAPTER 3

Tailor-Made News: Meeting the demands of news users on mobile and social media

Groot Kormelink, T & Costera Meijer, I (2014)
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Introduction

The audience's relationship with news is shifting. According to Purcell et al. (2010: 2), news use is becoming "portable, personalized, and participatory": in 2010, 33 percent of US cell phone owners accessed news on their cell phones, 28 percent of internet users personalized their home page with news they were particularly interested in, and 37 percent of internet users shared or commented about news or contributed to its creation. As new technologies have made it possible for users to tailor news entirely to their own preferences and practices, we will refer to portable, personalized, and participatory news as "tailor-made news".

However, despite users being able to decide what news to consume when, where, and how, millions of Dutch people still settle down in front of their TV every day to have the news presented to them. The evening news is especially popular: in 2012, the Eight O'Clock News (NOS) had a market share of 29.5 percent, attracting an average of 1.8 million viewers per night (NOS 2012). In fact, between 2000 and 2010, the average time per week Dutch viewers spent watching TV news increased from 67 to 103 minutes (Wonneberger, 2011). Chyi and Chadha (2012) found that as a news source, users rate (on a scale of 0 to 7) television (6.09)—as well as print newspapers (5.94)—as more enjoyable than laptops (5.89), iPhone (5.52), iPad (5.46), e-readers (5.07), and non-iOS smartphones (4.72). Participants in research by Courtois, Verdegem, and De Marez (2011: 87) describe television as offering "the most pleasant experience because of its sound and image quality, its usability, accessibility and broad array of connectivity". As opposed to TV's lean-back experience, portable devices such as smartphones require more of a lean-forward experience, due to "the need to multi-task e.g. text messaging, … minimal screen size, the need to physically support the device" (Cui, Chipchase, and Jung 2007: 202). Dimmick, Feaster, and Hoplamazian (2011: 34) point out that mobile media are used for news particularly during "the interstices of the daily routine", when and where traditional platforms are unavailable or inconvenient. It seems hardly surprising, then, that in a media-rich environment, users choose television over newer, portable devices.

It appears that users are not flocking toward personalized news either. Despite the result of Purcell et al. (2010) that 28 percent of internet users personalize their home page, editors of 11 major news sites claim that reader surveys indicate little interest in "the more demanding and complex forms of personalization" (Thurman & Schifferes, 2012: 386): not even 10 percent of their audience employs any tools for personalization that require their direct input (i.e., "explicit personalization"). The editors expect that demand is so low because "[readers'] interests are probably not as narrow as we imagine [they] are" and because it takes "time and effort to personalize something" (386). Yet, none of these suggestions are supported by actual audience research.

Finally, the participatory tendencies of contemporary news users are also questionable. The presence of news on social networking sites (SNSs) does appear to be growing: while Baumgartner and Morris (2010) found that 26 percent of US college students get news from SNSs (e.g., Facebook, Myspace) three or more times a week, Hermida et al. (2012) found that on a typical day, 42 percent of Canadians receive news on SNSs (Facebook, Twitter) through family, friends, or acquaintances. However, such results tell us very little about the actual participatory nature of news use: to what extent do these users (re)share, like, or comment on these news updates? Picone (2011: 105) found that the average user needs an incentive to engage in produsage—"the personal productive use of information"—like having a connection to the news story, an altruistic motive, or a need for self-expression. Bakker (2013) discovered that when it comes to (political) news, only 6 percent of the Dutch population contributes content to any participatory platform (e.g., writing a tweet) at least once a month.

Reviewing all these "ifs" and "buts", it is doubtful whether news use really has become "portable, personalized, and participatory" (Purcell et al., 2010). Despite the technological possibilities, users have not turned en masse from passive receivers who consume news on the producers' terms, into active users who tailor news to fit their personal preferences and practices. Unmistakably, some power has shifted from producers to users, but it is unclear to what extent users actually wish to exert their newfound control. Under which circumstances do users want to tailor-make news, and under which circumstances do they not?

Methods

Taking as a focal point users' everyday experience with tailor-made news, our research breaks with two traditions within journalism studies. First of all, research tends to focus on news production and news content (Bird, 2011). The personalization of news is often introduced in passing as a logical reaction to the abundance of information users are confronted with nowadays (e.g., Delato et al., 2003), all but ignoring the question concerning the extent to which users actually desire or make use of personalized news. User preferences are even discussed without conducting audience research (e.g., Thurman & Schifferes, 2012).

Second, research on tailor-made news that does focus on users usually concerns quantitative studies (e.g., Chyi & Chadha, 2012; Hermida et al., 2012). Although ratings, shares, and surveys do provide information about frequencies of news consumption and user opinions about news, they offer little insight into the ways users actually experience and value tailor-made news in the context of everyday life. Previous research has also taught us that users' experience of news is a better predictor of their actual news use than their opinions about news (Costera Meijer, 2013).

To gain a comprehensive understanding of factors involved with the tailor-making of news, we approached our research question from three different angles: product, producer, and user (qualitatively as well as quantitatively). For the latter two projects, we used NOS News—the Netherlands' largest, public news organization—as a case study. First, we made an inventory of the options NOS News does and does not offer users for the tailoring of news (product). Second, we held in-depth interviews with five (chief) editors and policy makers at NOS News involved in decision making about tailor-made news (producer). Third, we held in-depth interviews with a wide spectrum of news users (e.g., laggards, early adopters), reaching a point of "theoretical saturation" (Charmaz, 2006) at 24 interviews. The interviews were comprised of creative methods including the think-aloud protocol, ranking exercises, sensory ethnography, and building one's ideal news site. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using interpretative repertoire analysis (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Finally, we checked the distribution of the user patterns we found in a survey (N = 270).

Results

Using triangulation when approaching our research question, as well as using various qualitative and quantitative methods, ensured the robustness of our conclusions. It allowed us to compare the supply, demand, and experience of tailor-made news, as well as both the producers' and users' underlying assumptions and rationales. Per section, we will first discuss the results from our NOS News case study (product and producer), setting the stage for the findings from our user project.

From Portable to On-demand

Both the inventory and the interviews with professionals clearly indicate that it is a major priority for NOS News to make its news available on portable devices. Within our tracking period (August 2012 to June 2013), NOS News released and optimized mobile apps for all major smartphone brands (Android, Apple, Blackberry, Windows Phone), as well as for the iPad, Windows 8 tablets, and laptops (and PCs). In 2012, the news organization also introduced a policy of internet first: each item is made available online immediately after it is finished, so that users no longer have to wait until the next bulletin for a news update, but can decide for themselves when and where to check these items.

By making its news available on portable devices as well as on-demand, NOS News clearly meets the demands of its users. Our survey demonstrates that users check news sites and apps throughout the day, and consequently expect news to be readily available at any place and any time. Whether that is the case is dictated first of all by the

"findability" of news. News should be easy to find; users do not, for example, want to search for the link to the latest bulletin. Second, users expect news items to be available separately. This goes for text as well as audio and video; users do not want to sit through a full bulletin for one particular item:

> What I like about [NOS.nl] is that you can listen to radio clips and clips from the [TV] bulletin without having to go through the entire bulletin … Then I think, good, now I can make my own selection. I want to feel like I have a hand in that. (Rosa, 26)

Although none of our research participants listen to or watch news clips on-demand frequently, they still appreciate having the option to pick any item they please. They want control: to be able to choose.

Personalized: Fatties with a Limited Worldview?

Our inventory of news "products" suggests that NOS News is reluctant to allow users to personalize their news. In terms of "explicit personalization" (Thurman, 2011), the news organization only offer RSS-feeds, which, according to Domingo (2008: 694), editors do not consider "a customization option that may take editorial power from their hands". In terms of "implicit personalization"—in which preferences are inferred from user data—NOS News only offers "contextual recommendations" ("Read also") and "aggregated collaborative filtering" ("Most watched", "Most listened") (Thurman, 2011).

Our interviews with professionals illustrate why NOS News is so hesitant to let users personalize their news: they fear personalization will lead to "only fatties" with "a limited or damaged worldview" (i.e., tunnel vision). The underlying assumption is that given the option, users will eat "junk news". The professionals feel that NOS News should "occasionally put a healthy sandwich in between", i.e., provide users with news stories that they "should read", selected by professionals because they "can make that selection better than the user". These results match what Domingo found on the basis of ethnographic research in news rooms:

> Journalists defended their professional values in selecting current events and deciding the hierarchy of what stories were the most important. Customization and audience active involvement in newsworthiness decisions were not comfortable ideals. (Domingo 2008, 697).

Paradoxically, the same NOS News professionals also claimed it would be paternalistic to uplift viewers and decide for them what they should know.

The fear of "fatties" with "a limited or damaged worldview", however, is unfounded: our results show that users are not too interested in personalizing their news menu. First of all, users are not willing to put time and effort into personalization. Both our qualitative and quantitative user research demonstrates that the vast majority (89 percent) of users prefer to accept news sites and news apps the way they are. They may not be interested in all the news offered to them, but if they do not want to read specific news items or categories, they simply skip them. Indeed, ignoring uninteresting news involves so little effort that it requires too much effort to change settings in order not to have to see this news anymore:

> I don't know how to do that and uh [laughs] I'm not going to spend time doing that, I just think uh, the app is the way it is, and if I want to read [a news item], I'll read it, and if I don't want to read it, I'll skip it. (Carina, 30)

Users seem to be more willing to personalize news when it irritates them. This is particularly the case with sports news: one NOS News professional informed us that the lack of option to block push notifications about breaking sports news drew criticism from users. Also, during our in-depth interviews, some one-third of our participants claimed to want to get rid of the category "sports". However, the think-aloud protocol revealed that there is a marked difference between what users want and what they do. Koen (26) replied affirmatively ("Yes, yes, yes, yes, yes") when asked if he would want to throw sports news out of his app, but during the think-aloud protocol he admitted he had never taken the time or effort to look into this. The number of users who would actually personalize their news, then, could be even lower than our survey indicates.

Many of our participants were not particularly interested in economic news either, yet were adamant about keeping this category in. They might skip it 9 out of 10 times, but still want the option to pick out that one interesting story. The second reason users do not want to personalize their news, then, is that they do not want to miss anything. Even if they do not actually click on all or even most of the news, they still want to "check" (Costera Meijer, 2008) or "monitor" the headlines "so that they may be alerted on a very wide variety of issues for a very wide variety of events" (Schudson, 1998: 310). A few informants even admitted they did not want to personalize their news out of fear to get "tunnel vision"; they are afraid of the very same "limited or damaged worldview" that the NOS News professionals worry about. On a more positive note, our participants enjoy "serendipitous news discovery" (Purcell et al., 2010), i.e., coming upon news they did not know would interest them.

The third reason users do not want to personalize their news is that they want the news organization to do this for them. That is, they want editors to select and present them with the most relevant and topical news—the stories that they "ought" to know:

> If I choose to read a news site that means I think they are good at filtering the news for me, so if they think something is important, I assume it is. (Willem, 30)

Both our qualitative and quantitative user research clearly demonstrates that users appreciate being presented with news selected on the basis of classic journalistic values like relevance and topicality. They may not read it attentively or click on it, but they appreciate it being there because it gives them an impression of what is happening in the world. This research result might contradict findings from Boczkowski & Mitchelstein (2013) that there exists a gap between the news that producers provide and the news that users desire.

Participatory: Social Medium or News Medium?

Our inventory of tailor-made news and our interviews with professionals show that NOS News is searching for the best way to present news on social media. During the first months of our research, their news stream on both Facebook and Twitter mirrored the one on NOS.nl: each item that was placed on the website was automatically posted on these social media. However, having since realized that both news platforms require a specific approach, NOS News began to cater to the particular demands users have on each platform. On Twitter, they put out tweets that were longer and more informative than the headlines on NOS.nl. On Facebook, they attuned to the social character of the medium, addressing users as a community ("Good morning, Facebook") and posting news more sparingly and accompanied by enticing captions ("What do you think about this?"). One professional noted that it is exactly Facebook's "social" nature that makes finding the right news strategy a challenge; Twitter is easier as that "of itself is more of a news medium".

Our survey confirms these expectations. Whereas only 17 percent of Twitter users wish not to encounter any news at all, this goes for almost half of Facebook users (49 percent). Most users (78 percent) log onto Facebook to communicate with friends. Only a small minority uses Facebook to check (14 percent), share (14 percent), or discuss (12 percent) news. When our participants do share news on Facebook, this usually concerns funny or entertaining stories. In contrast, on Twitter, a much larger group comes to check (46 percent), share (30 percent), and discuss (27 percent) news.[2] While news does

2 Compared to Bakker (2013), these numbers may seem high. However, as we only asked our respondents to rate such statements as "I come on Facebook to [communicate with friends, check/share/discuss the news etc.]", the frequencies of these user practices are not known.

seem to play a relatively substantial role within Twitter, Facebook is predominantly seen as a medium to share personal stories. These results, then, underline the importance of differentiating between social networking sites: treating Facebook, Twitter, and other SNSs as if they, and, by extension, the accompanying user practices, were all one and the same, is to overlook critical differences between the genre conventions of these platforms.

More than Information

Although the focus of our research was on tailor-made news, we also explored in more detail the circumstances under which users do not want to tailor news to their own preferences and practices. This is the case particularly when people use news less as an end (i.e., to inform oneself) than as a means, e.g., to structure one's day or for social reasons. Firstly, 33 percent of our survey respondents have news on in the background when they are home. Jantien turns on the news while she is preparing dinner. It moves to the foreground when she is cutting her vegetables, but it is just as easily relegated to being a background noise when she walks into the kitchen:

> I walk on and off between the kitchen and the TV, but I also cut my vegetables in front of the TV … I'm not like, "Oh it's 6 pm, I'm going to watch the news". It's more that it coincides with, I'll go cut the vegetables and … I'll turn on the TV with it, because I just think that's nice. (Jantien, 28)

Jantien is not in the first place interested in the content of the news; instead, the news structures her evening as a "behavorial regulator" (Lull, 1990: 36). Time to cook is time to watch the news. The news also offers "a flow of constant background noise [and] a companion for accomplishing household chores and routines" (36). During these moments, Jantien is not interested in tailoring news to her own preferences and practices. In fact, when she settles down in front of her TV she just wants to sit back and enjoy the show.

Second, 35 percent of our survey respondents enjoy watching news with other people and commenting on it. Here, too, it is less about the content of news as a source of information than it is about news as a resource of sociability: watching together. Fien used to watch just "one show a day", but when her son moved in, her viewing habits changed:

> Since Koen is here, I watch a lot more TV … It becomes sociable when you watch with someone, you can comment on it, especially if it's mildly ridiculous. (Fien, 56)

When news is used as "a resource for the construction of desired opportunities for interpersonal contact" (Lull 1990, 38), personal preferences are temporarily put aside so that users can enjoy their experience of watching the news together.

Thirdly, 32 percent of our survey participants admitted to following the news so they have something to talk about with other people. In these cases it is not their personal selection that counts, but what other people find relevant and important. Here, news organizations' strategies of "implicit personalization" (Thurman, 2011) prove useful. On his ideal news site, Joost wants a "Most read" section because this allows him to quickly gather what people are talking about:

> I don't follow the news the entire day, sometimes I miss it, sometimes I forget it, so here you can always see, "Oh, this is a big issue to everyone." (Joost, 28)

When Marjolijn (25) visits her relatives, she quickly reads up on the latest sports and gossip news. She is not interested in the content itself, but it serves to create common ground with her family: "[I like] it better to be part of a conversation, than all the time going: 'Oh I don't know, I don't know, I don't know'". With this "communicative function" of news (e.g., Costera Meijer, 2008), users do not want to tailor news content to their own preferences, but they do expect news to be available on-demand, so they can consult it whenever and wherever they need to.

Old Habits, New Habits

New platforms have enabled new habits, such as "checking" the news (Costera Meijer, 2008), and research suggests that these habits coexist with older habits, like watching the evening news (e.g., Van Cauwenberge, d'Haenens, & Beentjes, 2010). Surprisingly, our results show that old news habits are also maintained on new media. Bram (28) claims, on the one hand, that watching NOS Journaal on-demand on his laptop gives him a feeling of control: "You no longer have to sit down at a specific time." However, he still likes to watch the Eight O'Clock News (NOS) through live streams. Regardless of the possibilities new media offer to take control over the time (and place) of news use, the Eight O'Clock News continues to structure Bram's evening. Similarly, in the morning, Dick and his colleague watch the news together on his iPad. This activity marks the start of their workday, offers them a sociable moment, and gives them something to talk about:

> It's about that coffee moment together before you really get to work … I find I really enjoy that, watching the news together and afterward discussing the things that caught your eye. (Dick, 55)

Unlike Courtois, Verdegem, & De Marez (2011) suggested, the tablet computer is taking over some of the functionalities of television. When we first interviewed Joan (55), she could not imagine watching the news on her newly bought iPad, noting it could never compete with the picture and sound quality of her TV. However, three months later she informed us that she had in fact started watching NOS Journaal on-demand on her iPad, mostly during the weekend when she is unsure about the NOS airing schedule. If new media are not replacing old media, then, our findings indicate that new and old habits are at the very least intertwining. In December 2013, we launched a five-year research project that looks at how digitalization enables and inhibits new habits and patterns of news consumption, and how news organizations can optimally cater to these changing practices and preferences.

Conclusion

News organizations feel pressure to keep up with the latest technological developments for fear of being left behind (Thurman & Schifferes, 2012). Although technology has made it possible for users to tailor news entirely to their specific preferences and practices, our results suggest that users have limited interest in personalizing or participating in news. What they desire is control: to be able to consult all content whenever and wherever they want it, and to be able to choose anything without having to choose anything. Being in control means that news items should be (1) readily and separately available. News should also be (2) easy to pass or ignore at all times. Users want to be able to read or scroll past uninteresting items effortlessly. News should be (3) presented in a clear manner. Users do not want to be flooded with an abundance of information. A layered or opt-in presentation of the news (e.g., hyperlinks) helps: it gives users control over the amount of information they see (Lagerwerf & Verheij, 2013). Finally, news should be (4) selected and presented by the news organization on the basis of relevance and topicality. Users want to be able to see the most important and most current news at first glance. They experience this news selection and presentation as professionalism rather than as paternalism; it is this particular kind of tailoring service they expect from professional news organizations. Although users might not click on all or even most of the headlines, they want to be aware of the major news stories. They want the option to choose any story that fits their needs at any given moment.

CHAPTER 4

What clicks actually mean: Exploring digital news user practices

Groot Kormelink, T & Costera Meijer, I (2018)
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Introduction

The digitalization of journalism has enabled news organizations to minutely monitor the behaviour of online news users. Through such tools as Chartbeat and Google Analytics news professionals know exactly and often in real time how many users are spending how much time on which news item. Web metrics are not only monitored by individual journalists but also displayed on big screens in newsrooms and forwarded to staff by editors-in-chief.

Scholars and news professionals have tended to take metrics at face value by assuming a close correspondence between clicks and audience interests. Since 'most viewed lists' are often dominated by news about entertainment, crime and sports, it is assumed that news users are more interested in "junk" than in "public affairs" news (politics, economics, international relationships) (e.g. Tenenboim & Cohen, 2015; Tewksbury, 2003). Boczkowski & Mitchelstein (2013) speak of a "news gap" between the preferences of journalists and news users. This article problematizes the relationship between clicks and audience interests. Rather than looking at metrics, we observed how news users in everyday circumstances browse news and asked them what moves them to click or not to click. The aim of this research is to explore what (not) clicking means to people and to what extent clicks reflect their news interests.

Literature review

Professional autonomy versus pleasing the masses

Monitoring audiences is hardly new. Schlesinger (1978: 111) describes how the BBC News had a large wallchart tracking how its Nine O'Clock News was doing in the ratings. However, monitoring was done mostly to track how they were doing relative to their competition. Other than today, the audience in itself was not an important consideration for journalists (Darnton, 1975; Gans, 1979; Schlesinger, 1978). Journalists had neither the tools nor the need for knowledge about their audience, as one producer illustrates: "I know we have twenty million viewers, but I don't know who they are. I don't know what the audience wants, and I don't care" (Gans, 1979: 234). Indeed, journalists actively resisted audience feedback. In the early 2000s, public TV journalists interpreted any discussion of audiences as potentially compromising journalistic autonomy (Costera Meijer, 2003). Journalists also feared that taking audience preferences into consideration equalled lowering journalistic standards (Costera Meijer, 2013; Gans, 1979). This binary opposition between professional autonomy and pleasing the masses, between making quality journalism while users apparently prefer trivial news, is deeply ingrained in the journalism profession.

The impact of clicks

Despite the autonomy-popularity binary, today, journalistic considerations have become audience-centric. Research shows how by and large, news organizations are having metrics inform their editorial decisions, from news presentation (news placement, headline adjustment) to news production (expanding or following up heavily clicked stories) (Anderson, 2011; MacGregor, 2007; Vu, 2014). Cross-lagged analyses show that audience clicks affect both news placement (Lee et al., 2014) and subsequent reporting (Welbers et al., 2015). Tandoc (2014) illustrates how editors select and de-select news items based on the web traffic they generate.

News organizations aiming for popularity monitor clicks most closely, whereas those whose brand identity hinges on quality emphasize the importance of their professional judgment (Welbers et al., 2015). Yet, Tandoc (2014) found no evidence of journalists weighing editorial autonomy and accommodating audiences while observing their everyday practices. Christin (2014) illustrates an ambivalence towards clicks: even journalists critical towards click-chasing do "understand online success as a signal of professional value" (n.p.). Similarly, Usher (2013) found that journalists at Al Jazeera English, who do not have to take economics into consideration, were nevertheless monitoring metrics for "personal validation"; they want their stories to do well (p. 346). Karlsson & Clerwall (2013) found that while public service journalists may not track metrics in real time, they do look to clicks to 'prove' their public relevance and thus provide legitimacy. Finally, journalists in the same study suggest clicks deserve not just a critical attitude as they can also help increase the quality of journalism: if clicks indicate 'important' stories did not reach the audience, journalists can take action (Karlsson & Clerwall, 2013).

Race to the bottom?

Scholars typically evaluate clicks from a critical perspective because clicking patterns are seen as evidence that users prefer junk news over news about public affairs (Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2013; Tenenboim & Cohen, 2015; Tewksbury 2003). This leads to worries about the future state of journalism and the implications for society. Although Nguyen (2013) notes that metrics "provide a considerable amount of accurate and reliable information for journalists and news executives […] to serve people in a more considered, more scientific manner", he warns that using them uncritically can lead to "the dumbing down of news" and "a disaster for public life in the long term" (p. 157). Tandoc & Thomas (2015) argue that the use of metrics "has the potential to lock journalism into a race towards the lowest common denominator, ghettoizing citizens into bundles based on narrow preferences and predilections rather than drawing them into a community" (p. 247). Such observations echo journalists' assumptions about the

narrow scope of the interests of the general public. As one journalist in Usher's (2013) research noted, "On a certain level you just can't give the masses what they want. You are selling your soul" (p. 343).

The relationship between clicks and interest

Scholars – and journalists – typically measure clicks in terms of the most read or viewed news stories, and in turn use these as a proxy for people's "preference" for or "interest" in news (e.g. Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2013; Schaudt & Carpenter, 2009; Tenenboim & Cohen, 2015). For instance, Schaudt & Carpenter (2009) conclude from most-viewed stories lists that readers "most preferred" the news values "proximity" and "conflict" and "least preferred" "timeliness" and "prominence". Similarly, Tenenboim & Cohen (2015) argue that "sensational topics and curiosity-arousing elements" being most heavily clicked indicates "that news consumers are mostly interested in non-public affairs news" (p. 212). However, other research suggests that clicking patterns may not accurately or fully capture the interests or preferences of news users. We previously found that people engage in online user practices that do not necessitate clicks but do express interest in news, such as "checking", "monitoring", "scanning" and "snacking" (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015). Von Krogh & Andersson (2015) found that measured in clicks (page views), "public sphere" accounted for 9 per cent of online news consumption, whereas measured in spent time it made up 20 per cent. Therefore, our aim is to explore what it actually means when users click on news and also what it means when they do not click, and how this relates to their (lack of) interest in or preference for news.

Methodology

To explore what clicks actually mean, we researched people's considerations for clicking and not clicking by looking at their everyday online news browsing. Our approach was mixing interviews with sensory ethnography and the think-aloud protocol (cf. O'Brien et al. (2014), who combined the think-aloud protocol with a simulated work task scenario). First, participants were asked to describe how they use news throughout the day, focusing on the "multisensoriality" (Pink, 2009: 1) of their experiences (e.g. what they feel, taste, smell, hear or see when using news). This approach allowed us to get a layered picture of their news use (e.g. checking news with an espresso or while riding the bus) and enabled our participants to call to mind their news user practices. Subsequently, using the concurrent think-aloud protocol (van den Haak et al., 2003), participants were instructed to browse news as they normally would – using their own devices and preferred websites and apps – and to say out loud all their steps and considerations. Participants were encouraged to comment on actions they failed

to mention spontaneously. We argue that the subsequent loss of natural flow was warranted given our aim of uncovering considerations for (not) clicking; indeed, subtle or subconscious actions like scanning or scrolling past a headline were as important as consciously clicking on news.

It should be noted that although most participants had little problem verbalizing their motivations, news users may not know precisely what they want and why they want it. Yet, we argue that having participants provide their own account of why they did (not) click might give a more accurate reflection of what clicking means to them than having them choose from pre-selected categories, as is often the case in uses and gratifications research (see, for an overview, Ruggiero, 2000). Although socially desirable answers should never be ruled out, the ease with which participants 'admitted' to reading entertainment or being tired of news about Syria suggests we obtained a fair picture of the news they would normally (not) click. We also sought to limit social desirability by having the interviewers demonstrate the think-aloud protocol to participants using such "interviewer self-disclosures" (Lindlof, 1995: 182) as "I usually go to the entertainment section". Finally, participants were selected from the social network of the interviewers as "the development of a personal relationship" is crucial for interviews that go "deeply into the person's experiences" (Lindlof, 1995: 171).

We seek to map the whole spectrum of considerations for (not) clicking rather than look for the distribution, frequency or representativeness of clicking patterns. Yet, common user patterns found across a relevant variety of news users might point to firmly anchored user patterns in general. A total of 56 people were interviewed in an everyday setting, typically their home. Participants were selected using "maximum variation sampling" which seeks to generate a wide range of data by including a broad spectrum of users (List, 2004). To enable capturing a variety of consideration for (not) clicking, our selection included 28 younger (19–35) and 28 older (50–65) users with various news habits (e.g. light or heavy digital use). The participants were from various (e.g. rural, urban) parts of the Netherlands, a country characterized by high rates of Internet penetration (96%) and online news use (81%) (Newman et al., 2016). We might, therefore, assume that their routines or preferences rather than obstructive technology (e.g. bad Internet connection) were the main factors in the participants' browsing behaviour. The interviews were conducted in February and March 2014 by seven Journalism MA students from Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam and typically lasted 20–40 minutes. This included the browsing of websites and apps, which ranged from quick "checking cycles" (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015) to lengthier reading sessions, depending on how the participant would normally use news. Devices used included computers, laptops, tablets and smartphones. Visited websites and apps varied but often concerned major Dutch titles including Nu.nl, NOS.nl and Telegraaf.nl.

The interviewers received extensive interview training and exhaustive feedback after each interview round. All interviews were recorded and transcribed. The process of analysis drew from the Grounded Theory Method, using constant comparison between data and analysis and allowing categories to emerge from the data themselves (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Initial open coding was done by the first author, whereas the labelling of the concepts and subsequent integration of concepts into categories was done in collaboration with the second author.

Because we are interested in participants' own considerations for (not) clicking, the categories are illustrated through interview quotes. Even if some labels seem self-evident, exploring the meaning of clicks for users demands taking seriously the perspective of the participants. Also, participants often had multiple reasons for (not) clicking on one particular headline, but since we want to map the variety and range of user patterns, the quotes illustrate the categories in their 'purest' form.

Considerations for clicking and not clicking

Following the procedures of the Grounded Theory Method (Corbin & Strauss, 1990), we found 30 distinct considerations for clicking and not clicking. After an extensive process of axial coding, the first major distinguishing factor between the considerations appeared to be whether or not they were content-related. The content-related considerations proved to be further divisible into cognitive and affective considerations. Here, 'cognitive' refers to considerations where the decision whether or not to click was made predominantly on a mental level ('thinking'), whereas 'affective' refers to considerations where the decision was made predominantly on an emotional level ('feeling'). We use the term 'predominantly' because the distinction between cognition and affect was more gradual than absolute. In the third category, not participants' thoughts or feelings about content but their pragmatic considerations were their dominant reference point for clicking or not clicking. For each consideration, we will note whether it concerns a reason to click or not to click (or both), and where applicable, we will discuss how it relates to selection criteria of news professionals (cf. O'Neill & Harcup, 2009).

Cognitive considerations

Recency and importance might be expected to be dominant considerations from a production perspective (cf. Golding and Elliott, 1979), yet were not mentioned much by our participants. **Recency** refers to whether the participant sees the news as timely or current. The limited mentions of this consideration seem to contradict research that indicates how users expect being presented with the latest news online (Bergström, 2008; see chapter 3). However, we argue that from a user perspective, recency may

constitute a general prerequisite for online news but not an important consideration when deciding which particular news item to click on.

Importance refers to whether the participant views the news as significant in the conventional sense. However, if from a professional perspective importance is about "need to know" (Golding & Elliott, 1979: 118), from a user perspective "ought to know" is a more accurate description. Sandra (25) illustrates how the placement of news on a website influences how important she perceives it to be:

> 'Cabinet: no clear picture of money laundering', I couldn't care less, so wouldn't click on that. […] If it was REALLY important it would have been big at the top [of the homepage]. Then maybe I would've clicked on it.

Online news presented as important through prominent placement on the website or news app is experienced as more worthy of knowing; if the same news is placed less prominently, it apparently is not significant enough to deserve a click. Like recency, importance is not a dominant consideration when deciding which individual headline to click on. They are not so much selection criteria for (not) clicking on news as prerequisites for selecting a news site or app in the first place. Indeed, reflecting the original function of the front page of newspapers, users do expect (professional) news websites or apps to show them what is recent and important (see chapter 3).

Participants often clicked on news that had **personal relevance**, relating to their everyday life, including work. This consideration is dual, meaning that it counts as reason to click when present and as reason not to click when absent. Henry (55), who invests, clicked on a news item about the stock market, but skipped a headline concerning the shares of a specific company: "I [don't invest] in companies, so the particular company mentioned here I couldn't care less about". Matthew (25) clicked on a headline about Samsung Galaxy S5: "because I want to buy a new phone" but skipped news about rented housing because "after [I leave my student house] I'm not going to rent, I will buy something immediately".

Golding & Elliott (1979) distinguish between professional selection criteria **geographical proximity** and **cultural proximity**, and from a user perspective we found a similar distinction. Both considerations are dual. First, participants tended to click if they saw the headline as concerning news taking place within their immediate surroundings, regardless of absolute distance. Bianca (54) clicked on a headline about a dead body found 20 km away from her hometown: "[City] is so close, I just wanna know. […] And if it's not so close then it's not interesting". Yet, Tracy (53) skipped a headline about an accident that happened within a similar distance because she did not experience it as nearby: "I think it didn't happen in this region but somewhere in the

south. No, that doesn't really interest me". Golding & Elliot's (1979) "cultural proximity" depends "on what is familiar and within the experience of journalists and their audience", but for our participants, more specifically, it refers to whether they recognize a kinship with the subject of the news, again regardless of absolute distance (p. 166). Leonard (24) clicked on sports news concerning compatriots: "I like cycling, especially if Dutch people are participating. […] I don't have to know if some Slovak won a round in Poland". Conversely, Dutch native Andrew (58) did not click on a headline regarding Antilleans in the Netherlands because he does not feel a connection: "It may be important, but […] not for me right now. […] Because I don't do anything with Antilleans. […] I mean, I don't know one Antillean and I don't know if they're good or bad".

Whereas for journalists **unexpected** refers to rare, out-of-the-ordinary developments (Galtung & Ruge, 1965), from a user perspective it is about whether the news fits *their* idea of what is common. Lilly (26) clicked on a headline about a joint action from a trade union and an employers' organization: "Seems interesting, I'm curious why [they] are on the same page here, seems a bit illogical". It is important to stress that what is unexpected to journalists may not be experienced as unexpected by users, and vice versa. For instance, Anita (21) did not click on news about a man lighting himself on fire: "Yeah, it's bad, but it's, I don't care […] because uhm, yeah it happens regularly".

Related to "unexpected" is the reason **this is logical**, where the user does not click because from their perspective the news is (too) obvious. Regarding the headline "Nokia unsure about brand name for the future", Nanda (21) noted that she already knew Nokia was not doing well: "Then this seems like a logical continuation. Then I don't have to read it, because I already know why that is".

Like journalists selecting stories already in the news (Galtung & Ruge, 1965; Harcup & O'Neill, 2001), participants regularly clicked on **follow-ups** to stories they had read before. Lauren (26) illustrates, "What catches my eye immediately is the headline […] 'Exam fraud [school] costs 3 million euro.' I've followed [that story] before". A dominant reason not to click was that the participant already knew about the news. Not to be confused with "follow-up" where users click on a new development, here they are already familiar with this particular development, as Karen (50) indicates: "[This] I already just heard, so I'm not going to read that again".

A dominant dual consideration was whether the subject of the headline **rang a bell** with the participant. This concerned famous people but also names or events the participants recognized but could not quite place, as Nina (54) illustrates: "That Benno L., you've heard something about that before and then [you're] like, gosh, who was that Benno L. again?" Conversely, Eddy (53) asks why he would click if the subject matter does not ring a bell: "'Fight parenting clinic and insurer resolved,' well, I wouldn't know what a parenting clinic is, so (laughs) I'm like, why should I read that?"

More detail on particulars comes into consideration when the headline raises a question in the participant's mind, causing them to want to know more about the situation, as Jack (56) illustrates: "Heavy weather in Italy, I see […] (clicks) What is going on here?" For a similar reason, Karen (50) clicked on a headline about a fishing ban: "Then I'm like, what do we catch there? […] What kind of fish is swimming there?"

Another reason to click was that the news enables participants to **join in conversation**. Rod (24) explains why he clicked on a headline about the Winter Olympics:

> Because if you start a conversation with people then often you want to talk about things that uh are recent and speak to a lot of people and uh the Winter Olympics I think are a part of that, so uhm to be able to join in the conversation, so to speak.

Rod's reason for clicking is the social utility function the topic provides: **fodder for conversation**. Teacher Joe (26) similarly clicked on a headline about the "'largest lunar impact ever recorded' because I also talk about that with my students."

Participants also clicked if they had **their own opinion** about a headline and wanted to see how it was discussed in the article. Jenna (27) clicked on the headline "World Bank freezes aid to Uganda over gay law" because "I personally have an opinion about it, so I'm curious on what grounds the World Bank does something like that". However, this consideration was uncommon; like in Donsbach's (1991) study that relativized the influence of cognitive dissonance on readers' selections, our participants rarely expressed strong opinions about headlines. If they did, disagreement was not a reason *not* to click.

Participants regularly did not click on news they thought was repeating itself. We labelled this **supersaturation**. Bruce (55) noted about the ongoing crisis in Syria: "Because every day it's the same, same, same, at some point it becomes less interesting. Even though it's not less terrible". This is less about "compassion fatigue" (Moeller, 1999) than about how hearing about it *again* does not provide new insights. The headline does not invite a click anymore, as Jeff (58) illustrates: "You actually drown in that kind of news. At some point you're like, it's not going to stop anyway. It's not that it's not important, but *it doesn't stop*". As we will elaborate later, not wanting to click on a headline does not mean the user does not want to *see* it. But for now the headline itself provides a sufficient update about the situation; it is not until 'something completely new' happens that Jeff (58) will click again.

Some participants clicked on headlines that offered a **new perspective**. This is not about the news event being unexpected but about the headline offering 'the other side' of a topic. Such news inspires because it adds to your knowledge or broadens

your horizon and as such enables an aha-erlebnis (cf. Costera Meijer, 2013). Corbin (24) illustrates,

> Here's an article called 'According to these three imams the Koran has nothing against gays'. That's interesting to me [because] you have this image that in the Koran it says that homosexuality is wrong and here it says something completely different, and I'm curious how that is substantiated by those imams.

Rather than the topic of homosexuality and the Islam it is the original angle of the headline that makes Corbin click.

Sometimes, participants clicked on a headline because they wanted to see for themselves or 'experience' what happened. We labelled this **participatory perspective**. An example is Nick (24), who clicked on the headline "Man makes illegal base jump from moving ski lift" because he "can't really picture how anyone would do that" and hoped to see it in a video.

A reason not to click was that the headline was **just an opinion**. Regarding a developing story about the possible resignation of a minister, Tara (20) noted, "If a decision really has been taken, I'll find it interesting, but […] nine out of ten times it's blether. […] If [prime minister] says '[He] is staying,' then that's not a truth but just an opinion". What keeps Tara from clicking is the lack of validity or decisiveness.

A similar reason for not clicking was **disjointed news fact**, where the participant does not want to read a story until it is finalized. Tara (20) is not interested in clicking on isolated updates about developments she is already aware of: "I don't need to have that information in between, […] I want the *answer*, you know, the *conclusion*". From a user perspective, even the conclusion of a story can be a disjointed news fact. Mark (52) did not click on a headline concerning a resolved conflict, because he was not aware of the problem in the first place: "You have to know what the problem is [and] then you can also know: what is the solution? […] But yeah, just an isolated little fact, I would never read that". About a headline regarding the Ukraine, he similarly argued that it concerned a detail too small to warrant a click. If he were to click, he would also want to know the context: "What is the cause? How did it happen? What happened? Why do they do it? What do they want to achieve?" This suggests that Mark would appreciate a headline like "5 things you should know about the crisis in the Ukraine" that allowed him to get a full picture of the situation within one article.

An important finding was that sometimes the participant did show (signs of) interest in particular news items and yet did not click. The narrative construction of the headline appeared to be a relevant factor. A frequent occurrence was that the participants showed interest in the news itself but the headline was **informationally**

complete and consequently, they did not expect to be better informed by clicking. Lauren (26) noted, "'More than 4 million viewers for Olympic finals 1500 meters,' that's a fun fact to know, but I know that this is usually all the information you're gonna get, so I don't really have to click it anymore". This is the opposite of clickbait: Lauren is interested in the topic, but there is no need to click because the headline tells the whole story. Nick (24) similarly illustrates, "I see it says 'Final will be great,' so I already know they're in the final so I don't necessarily have to click it".

Finally, sometimes there was an **associative gap**: despite the participants' apparent interest in a topic, the headline did not tell them enough to want to click. Ella (51) read, "Pieterburen [location of a famous seal crèche] will possibly move to [island]" and said, "The headline doesn't tell me much, that's why I don't click it". However, later in the interview she did click on a headline that explicitly mentioned "seals" and said she was fascinated by them. Clearly, she had not made the connection between Pieterburen and seals. Based on clicks, it would be tempting to conclude that Ellen was not interested in this article, but based on her comments about how much seals "intrigue" her, it seems safe to assume that she is. Similarly, Matthew (25) was clear about his interest in clicking the headline "Warning Kerry about Cold War Ukraine", claiming he was following all news about the country because he planned to visit its city Chernobyl, "and of course I'm not gonna go there if there is almost a civil war". Yet, he did not click on a headline about former Ukrainian president Janoekovitsj because "I don't know exactly who that is, so I think I would skip that". While this consideration is similar to "ring a bell", the focus here is not the topic; instead, it is about not being able to make a connection between the headline and the user's (pre-existing) interest in the topic.

Cognitive considerations

- *Recency*. Whether the user sees the news as timely or current.
- *Importance*. Whether the user sees the news as something they ought to know.
- *Personal relevance*. Whether the topic has a relation to the user's everyday life.
- *Geographical proximity*. Whether the user sees the news as concerning their immediate surroundings.
- *Cultural proximity*. Whether the user recognizes a kinship with the news.
- *Unexpected*. Whether the user sees the news as surprising.
- *This is logical*. The user thinks the news is obvious.
- *Follow-up*. The user wants to know the sequel to a story she has been following.
- *Already know*. The user has already heard the news elsewhere.
- *Ring a bell*. Whether the protagonist or subject matter of the news rings a bell with the user.
- *More detail on particulars*. The user wants to know what exactly is going on.

- *Join in conversation*. The user expects to be able to bring the news up in conversation.
- *Own opinion*. The user wants to see how a topic they have an opinion about is discussed in the news.
- *Supersaturation*. The user thinks the news repeats itself too often.
- *New perspective*. The headline offers a different perspective that sheds new light on the topic.
- *Participatory perspective*. The user wants to witness the news event.
- *Just an opinion*. The user wants facts rather than opinions.
- *Disjointed news fact*. The user wants the whole story, not an isolated update.
- *Informational completeness*. The user has no need to click because the headline says it all.
- *Associative gap*. The user is unable to connect the headline to the topic.

Affective considerations

Participants clicked on **disheartening** headlines, similar to the news value 'bad news' (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001). Sarah (21) illustrates, "This one I would read: 'Biker killed by car.' That's just sad". However, if participants found the headline too disheartening, they skipped it: "It's such a heavy text, 'Dragging patients is risky.' I prefer starting with happy news" (Jeff, 58). Indeed, on the other side of the emotional spectrum, participants clicked on light-hearted, fun headlines that made them feel good. Isabel (30) illustrates, "Something about self-cleaning plastic for cars. […] Yeah, that's a fun news item. […] It's light, […] just nice to read". While this corresponds to the news value "good news" (Harcup & O'Neill, 2001), from a user perspective "feel good" is about the impact of the news rather than its genre.

Some participants clicked on headlines because they found the accompanying image **visually appealing**, also a selection criterion for journalists ("visual attractiveness") (Golding & Elliott 1979: 155). Danny (25) is not interested in the news itself, but the picture evokes arousal: "On Nu.nl you often have these dumb items about, I don't know, the New Year's dive. Couldn't care less, but if it happens to have a picture of a lady, I do click on it".

Similar to the news value Harcup & O'Neill (2001) labelled "entertainment", participants regularly clicked on headlines that **bemused** them. More specific than wanting to be amused, they feel a strong urge to click on the headline because they feel excitedly puzzled by it. Eva (19) illustrates, "Something provocative like 'Anders Breivik: Playstation 2 instead of Playstation 3 is torture,' […] then I think what is this about? And then I click it and read it". Such headlines usually concern remarkable or bizarre news, which might partially explain why this type of news is so heavily clicked (cf. Tenenboim

& Cohen, 2015). The colloquial term for this is clickbait – headlines with a "what-the-hell" factor that makes the user want to click, as Martin (24) illustrates: "Actually it never has any news value, but it's usually those headlines that make you think, yeah, I'm curious what it is exactly". A related reason not to click was that the participant felt the news was bullshit. Leonard (24) explains, "Now I see 'German cat survives 30-meter fall.' Then you're like, I don't care. […] I think it's a bit rubbish actually". We classified this as affective instead of cognitive because it is a gut reaction dismissing the pettiness of the headline rather than a cognitive deliberation about whether or not the topic is nonsense. However, this consideration was mentioned less often than "bemusement", where the silliness of the headline was exactly what does make users click.

Another dominant dual consideration for (not) clicking was the **categorical welcome or rejection** of a particular 'beat' or topic that participants felt, respectively, enthusiasm or aversion towards. The latter was often the case with sports news, as Ruth (24) illustrates: "The last [headline] is sports news, sports mean nothing to me". Anita (21), on the contrary, categorically welcomes news about sports with which she has affinity but rejects others: "I don't find soccer interesting, so I skip those headlines automatically. But ice skating and tennis, those I do follow". While this consideration is similar to "personal relevance", the emphasis here is on the feeling the headline evokes rather than the recognition of how the topic relates to one's life.

A surprising finding was that some participants clicked on news that **gleefully annoyed** them. Lilly (26) clicked on the headline "President of Uganda will sign antigay law" because she found it "particularly bothersome that again there is a country that does not understand that homosexuality is not something you should draft a law against, so yeah, I'll read that news and be very irritated by it". Isabel (30), similarly, clicked rather than ignored a headline that annoyed her: "Bart Veldkamp once again has an opinion. […] Now he thinks that the Netherlands should share their ice-skating knowledge. […] It does evoke a bit of irritation, that headline. I'm like, you became a Belgian".

Affective considerations

- *Disheartenment*. The user is saddened by the news.
- *Feel-good*. The light-hearted news makes the user feel good.
- *Visual appeal*. The image evokes the urge to want to see more.
- *Bemusement*. The user feels excitedly puzzled by the headline.
- *Bullshit*. The user instantly dismisses of the pettiness of the headline.
- *Categorical welcome/rejection*. The user feels either enthusiasm or aversion towards the beat or the topic of the news.
- *Gleeful annoyance*. The user is delightfully enraged by the news.

Pragmatic considerations

Some participants did not click on news that would **disrupt** an otherwise smooth user experience, for instance, due to loading time or commercials when clicking videos. Bruce (55) illustrates, "Then you have to sit through commercials before you can watch something. Well, I won't do that, I don't want to". A related reason not to click mostly associated with videos was that the item was **data-heavy**. Here platform-specificity also plays a role. Joe (26) does click videos about wrestling news on his computer, but not on his smartphone: "Videos […] I'd rather not watch on my phone because, well, data heavy". Clicking would cost him too much.

Finally, participants did not click on news when it **did not fit their routine**. Josh (62) only has a few minutes to check headlines before he leaves for work, where the radio is playing the whole day. He skipped a headline about a poison gas attack in Syria, explaining, "That's very important, […] but I'm sure I'll hear it on the radio". Similarly, Jenna (27) skipped a headline noting she would only click on it if she "really took the time to really dive into it". While interested, clicking right now did not fit her schedule.

Pragmatic considerations

- *Disruption*. Clicking will interrupt a smooth user experience.
- *Data-heaviness*. Clicking will use up too much data.
- *Does not fit routine*. Clicking does not match with the user's schedule.

Browsing patterns without click

Another important finding is that the participants engaged in online browsing patterns that did express interest in news, yet did not necessitate a click. Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink (2015) have previously labelled these distinct user practices "checking", "monitoring", "snacking" and "scanning". Checking means quickly and efficiently finding out whether anything new or interesting is happening by looking at the latest headlines (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015). Clicks are not automatically involved, as Billy (52) illustrates: "For me it's important to just quickly see things, so just a [homepage] is fine, just the [headlines]. […] I actually use it just to quickly see what the latest news is". Just because users do not click on an item, does not mean that they do not want to see the headlines. Danny (25) explains, "It's nice that you kind of know what is happening in the world. Because let's say [the item] wasn't there anymore. […] Then people start to talk and then you really don't know anything about it". For social purposes, then, he does want to check the latest important news: "The headlines I'd want, yes, but the articles themselves, uh, whatever".

Monitoring is "actively surveying the informational environment to be able to come into action when necessary" (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015: 671).

Annabel (53) describes, "When those two criminals were on the loose last week, I constantly looked on my phone to see if they were caught. That was really scary". Even though Annabel was continually monitoring her smartphone for updates, no clicks were registered. In similar fashion, Henry (55) uses his phone to monitor his investments: "I return to that at least once every two hours, because I want to see how my portfolio is developing". In both the cases, their evident interest in news was not captured in clicks.

Snacking is defined as grabbing "bits and pieces of information in a relaxed, easy-going fashion to gain a sense of what is going on" (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015: 670). Danny (25) describes how he snacks on a website about movie news without clicking: "I scroll a bit and look at pictures and at movies and then I click away [from the site]".

Scanning means picking out "the highlights of news in order to get the gist of the story" (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015: 671). Tara (20) illustrates how scanning does not necessitate any clicking. Although she does want to know about the news, she plucks words from the lead on the homepage to get the essence: "Like here: they 'foresee no profits,' it's about 'Dutch companies,' OK, then I know enough". As noted, even headlines can be so informationally complete that they do not necessitate a click even if the user is interested.

Conclusion and discussion

This article explored what clicks mean from a user perspective and to what extent they reflect the interests of news users. Asking and observing how people browse online news, we found 30 considerations for clicking or not clicking, classifiable into three categories: cognitive, affective and pragmatic. These differences are not normative but descriptive of the level on which the decision to click or not click is made: mental, emotional or practical. Taking an open, user-centred grounded theory approach rather than employing prefigured categories (e.g. from uses and gratifications theory) has resulted in a more complex account of people's digital news use. For instance, cognitive considerations are not limited to information seeking (surveillance) but include the (lack of) recognition of news (ring a bell, associative gap) and the perception of how news is presented (e.g. disjointed news fact, just an opinion, new perspective). Likewise, affective considerations go beyond entertainment or positive affect and include feelings of negative (disheartenment) and mixed affect (gleeful annoyance). Our user-centred approach has also generated a vocabulary for news values and selection criteria that puts focus not on how news is sent but how it is received. The detailed labels might be relevant for journalism professionals seeking to understand what user experiences like enthusiasm and aversion are based on and provide a handle on how to effectuate or avoid such reactions.

Our results suggest that while clicking does indicate some type of interest, preference or engagement towards news, these concepts are too crude to account for the wide variety of people's considerations for (not) clicking; our precise labels provide a more fine-grained vocabulary. More importantly, even if one seeks a rough estimate of people's news interests, clicks are a flawed instrument. First, pragmatic considerations unrelated to interest in content interfere with users' clicking behaviour. Second, headlines can tell users interested in particular topics too little (associative gap) to warrant a click or enough (informational completeness) not to warrant a click. Finally, digital news user practices such as checking, monitoring, snacking and scanning may not involve any clicking, but do fulfil valuable functions for users, including being brought up to speed on the latest 'public affairs' developments without interrupting one's news flow. In terms of news interests, then, the news gap between news makers and news users may not be as wide or unbridgeable as Boczkowski & Mitchelstein (2013) point out. If news users appreciate browsing without having to click, future research might explore the underlying logic of these experiences as well as how non-clicking browsing patterns can be optimally facilitated and measured.

Our argument is not that clicks are meaningless, they just capture a limited range of users' interests or preferences. Clicks may be helpful for news organizations looking to increase traffic through A/B testing of headlines or article placement (Cherubini & Nielsen, 2016). Although they have proved complex to monetize (Batsell, 2015; Cherubini & Nielsen, 2016), metrics that measure various forms of engagement (see Napoli, 2011) seem promising because they capture a broader array of digital user practices than only clicking. Such metrics could help organize websites and apps so as to accommodate users' diverse expectations and desires at different times and in different contexts. In addition, information about users might be used not for "ghettoizing citizens into bundles based on narrow preferences and predilections" (Tandoc & Thomas, 2015: 247) but for tracing and providing news that has "proportional relevance" (Costera Meijer, 2003) to different communities. For instance, students are not only interested in news about students but also – as participant Matthew suggested – interested in news about the starter-home market. However, each metric should be assessed critically rather than taken at face value. Our research has shown how an open, qualitative user-centred approach can help examine what metrics do and do not measure.

If clicks only tell part of the story, our own methods are not without limitations either. The concurrent think-aloud protocol forces participants to consider and verbalize actions that in everyday life are often done automatically or subconsciously. Therefore, we encourage other researchers to further explore clicking and not clicking using different methods, such as (video) ethnography, tracking devices or screen capture tools.

Finally, and paradoxically, by giving people what they supposedly "want" – as captured in clicks – news organizations could end up harming not only democracy but also themselves, as adhering to clicks might lead to the trivialization of news and thus to a decreasing interest of users.

CHAPTER 5

"It's Catchy, but It Gets You F*cking Nowhere": What Viewers of Current Affairs Experience as Captivating Political Information

Groot Kormelink, T & Costera Meijer, I (2017)
"It's catchy but it gets you f*cking nowhere: What viewers of current affairs experience as captivating political information."
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Introduction

The democratic relevance of political news has been widely noted. Not only are journalists expected to hold those in power accountable, political news and information are also supposed to enable citizens to make informed political decisions, and help them understand the world around them, including how democracy itself works (Schudson, 2008). Yet, many scholars are concerned about journalism's ability to fulfill these democratic functions due to the public's apparent lack of interest in political news and other "public affairs" news (e.g., Blekesaune et al., 2012; Mindich, 2005; Patterson, 2007). One genre in particular news users seem to be tuning out of is (serious) current affairs TV (Turner, 2005; Wonneberger et al., 2012; Young, 2009). Turner (2005: 156) suggests this is problematic because "the value of an independent, reliable and ethical means of interrogating the news of the day, while providing informed and expert comment, is fundamental to an open democratic society." Current affairs TV appears to be caught in a dilemma: to have a raison d'être, it has to be watched, but attracting viewers might come at the expense of its democratic value.

Despite these concerns, people's apparent lack of interest in current affairs TV and the genre's potential to engage viewers have received limited scholarly attention. Political communication scholars typically focus on effects of general news, particularly various "popular" forms of television news such as infotainment, human interest, and horse-race news, on public opinion, political knowledge, attitudes, and (intended) behavior (e.g., Baum, 2002; Boukes et al., 2015; Cappella & Jamieson, 1997). Television reception studies have studied the effects of form and content manipulations on the cognition and the evaluation of television news (e.g., Grabe et al., 2000; Grabe et al., 2003; Hendriks Vettehen et al., 2008; Lang et al., 2005). A third strand of research has focused on people's experience of television news, finding, for instance, that young people tend to gravitate toward less officious formats including popular talk shows and satire because they experience mainstream news as boring and repetitive (Costera Meijer, 2007; Marchi, 2012). Although such formats may be valuable in their own right—for example, satire has a positive effect on political participation (Hoffman & Young, 2011) and soft news on exposure to public issues (Baum, 2002)—we are interested in how, from a user perspective, the traditional genre of currents affairs TV might be experienced as worth watching. This paper, therefore, explores how, without turning into a hybrid or popularized genre, current affairs TV can bring serious political information in such a way that viewers experience it as captivating. Ultimately, our aim is to develop user-defined quality criteria for current affairs TV.

Literature Review

User research confirms the conventional wisdom that news users are attracted to "popular" approaches to political news. For instance, in an oft-cited study, Iyengar et al. (2004: 162) found that "horserace news" received more page visits from users than news about political issues. Yet, several other studies have suggested that although popular news might attract and hold users' attention, it does not necessarily lead to satisfaction. Put differently, people's selection and judgment of news do not always overlap. Trussler & Soroka (2014) found that people's stated (dis)preference for negative or horse-race news did not predict their selection of news stories, whereas Lang et al. (2005) found that viewers' evaluations of newscasts did not predict which news they watched. Stanca et al. (2013) found that although sensational content ("verbal violence") in political talk shows led to longer viewing time, it also led to a less satisfactory overall viewing experience. Grabe et al. (2003) and Grabe et al. (2000) even found a difference between people's bodily and affective reactions to news with a "tabloid" production (e.g., sound effects, music, flash frames): It increased physiological measures of attention and arousal, but had, respectively, no significant effect or a negative effect on self-reported interest or enjoyment, and a negative effect on objectivity and believability. In a focus group study by Richardson et al. (2012: 120), participants criticized one political TV show's "entertainment-based logic, characterized as a marked tendency toward sensationalism or overstated negativity to pull in more viewers, rather than privileging a more edifying or informative perspective," and yet many did enjoy a clip of the show and chose it as the most interesting one. Costera Meijer (2007) labeled this asymmetry between attention and satisfaction, or selection and judgment, the "double viewing paradox":

> . . . [young people's] satisfaction about and even interest in "serious" news does not automatically cause them to watch it, while, vice versa, their contempt for light news programs ("stupid," "junk") does not keep them from watching. . . . (p. 106)

The studies cited above suggest that although people might gravitate toward selecting popular news, they have at least a potential interest in watching news with a "more edifying or informative perspective" (Richardson et al., 2012: 120). Indeed, other user research supports the notion that people are interested in serious information about politics—just not in the way it is typically approached in the news. For instance, Henderson (2014: 146) found that young people miss contextual knowledge needed to understand political news, particularly running conflicts, and therefore see no point in watching: "If you haven't kept up with what's going on and then . . . it's quite specific about a really complicated issue, you just switch it off." The desires these participants expressed for political news are markedly similar to those expressed by focus group

participants in Coleman and Moss's (2016: 10) study on election debates: a less formal, more modern style, more constructive and contextual information, more audience participation and representation, and less typical "politicians' answers" (Henderson 2014). Although not specifically concerned with political news, Costera Meijer (2007: 113) suggested that to attract and satisfy young people, news should not lower its standards (i.e., popularize) as journalists often assume but make it more captivating by including "questions of relationships, emotions, friendship and respect"—because these are important matters to young people even if they are not limited to the public sphere—as well as incorporating variations in style and multilayered storytelling. Concerning the latter, experiments show that news stories with exemplars evoke such emotions as empathy and compassion (Oliver et al., 2012) and stimulate cognitive responses (McGoldrick & Lynch 2016; Shen et al., 2014).

A useful lens through which to approach people's potential interest in political information might be the distinction between hedonism and eudaimonism. Whereas hedonism refers to the commonplace notion of entertainment as fun and pleasurable ("enjoyment"), eudaimonism is described by Oliver & Bartsch (2010) as "appreciation," or a meaningful, moving, and thought-provoking experience. Using eudaimonism to make sense of user experiences of political talk shows, Roth et al. (2014) found that eudaimonic experiences contribute significantly more to feeling informed than hedonistic experiences, whereas Bartsch & Schneider (2014: 390) found that "eudaimonic forms of emotional involvement" increased respondents' reflective thoughts about and interest in political issues.

While on one hand, then, users are attracted to popular approaches to news, on the other, there is a hesitation toward this news as well as a potential interest in more meaningful, moving, or thought-provoking news. Mutz & Reeves (2005: 13–14)—who found that uncivil political discourse attracts viewers but has negative effects on their political trust—leave us with the challenge of "how to create political programming that is both interesting and exciting to watch yet not likely to damage public attitudes in a significant way." We seek to move beyond the "double viewing paradox" (Costera Meijer, 2007) and bridge the gap between attention and satisfaction by exploring how serious political information can be told in such a way that viewers experience it as captivating. Our aim, again, is to develop user-defined quality criteria for current affairs TV.

Method

To develop a rich understanding of what viewers experience as captivating political information, we watched—and immediately thereafter discussed—current affairs items with a total of fifty-four participants. We selected two Dutch shows: EenVandaag, a daily current affairs show (DS) and Buitenhof, a weekly political interview show (WS), both

aired by public broadcasters. DS airs Mondays to Saturdays from 06:15 to 06:45 p.m. and presents its items in a varied, lively, and often "narrative" style. It seeks to reach a broad audience by bringing information in an understandable way: "not going down on your knees [but] it has to be palatable: make me care" (personal communication, 2015). WS airs Sundays from 12:10 to 01:10 p.m. and consists of lengthy in-studio interviews. It seeks to "inform" a relatively higher educated, politically interested audience "and make them think," and while open toward attracting a younger audience, it "does not have to popularize [or] reach a bigger audience that is less well educated" (personal communication 2015). The selected items reflected the variety of styles within both shows: DS items included various degrees of narrativity (e.g., exemplar stories versus "talking heads") and production features (e.g., infographics, music). WS items included various types of guests (e.g., politicians, experts) and interview setups (e.g., one-on-one interview, debate). Although current affairs TV may include a wider range of topics, we chose to select only items related to politics.

Seeking to know what makes current affairs TV worth watching from a user perspective, we opted for the term captivating rather than engaging. First, engagement refers to connecting with audiences from a production perspective (Batsell, 2015), regardless of their actual experiences. Second, from an audience perspective, engagement is generally operationalized as a form of "political participation" (Ekman & Amnå, 2012). We argue that by taking an open approach toward captivation (watching and discussing items with participants) rather than checking it through closed propositions in surveys, our results provide more detailed and comprehensive insights into the experience of watching current affairs TV.

As we sought to explore how both shows can be experienced as more captivating without turning into a hybrid or popularized genre, we used theoretical sampling to select participants based on their (potential) affinity with each show (Lindlof, 1995). We argue it would be less fruitful to interview people outside of the shows' target audiences, as illustrated by one poorly selected participant in the DS study. During the interview, she emphasized she was "not at all" interested in politics and had no intention of watching a current affairs show unless it became more like a satirical, provocative show she enjoyed, infamous for ridiculing politicians, that is, unless it became a different genre altogether. Taking into consideration the different aims of each show (as outlined above), for WS, we selected eighteen participants who claimed to be politically interested and to watch the show at least occasionally. For DS, we selected thirty-six participants who were not necessarily politically interested or regularly watched the show, but at least expressed potential interest in watching it. To limit potential social desirability, rapport (Lindlof, 1995) was improved by selecting participants from the social circle of the interviewers. Participants in both groups were roughly equally divided along gender lines and

included varying ages (nineteen to ninety-two). For WS, eight participants were under forty, and ten were over fifty. For DS, twenty-one participants were under forty, and fifteen were over fifty. Both groups included varying levels of education (low to high), but on average were fairly well educated. This is a limitation of the DS study, as this show aims for a broader audience.

The interviews took place in February and March 2015 and typically lasted thirty to sixty minutes. In each semistructured interview, two or three items from either DS or WS were watched and discussed. The interviews included open questions such as, "Could you tell me in your own words what you just saw?" "How would you describe the difference between this item and the last one?" and "What did you find most (or least) captivating about the item?" It deserves emphasis that the Dutch word for captivating (boeiend) is more self-explanatory than its English counterpart. Most interviews were conducted in the participants' living rooms. For pragmatic reasons, the items were usually played on laptops. Nine M.A. students in journalism (Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam) were trained intensively to perform the interviews. This training included reflection on their own viewing experiences and comparing them with fellow students and watching and analyzing the selected items to help them decide when to carefully probe. Students performed trial interviews and received extensive feedback after each interview round. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed using thematic analysis, an "iterative process" consisting of going back and forth between the stages of "identifying substantive statements" and "deciding on categories" (Gillham, 2005: 137). Because we wanted to enlarge the vocabulary about the experience of journalism, we focused on variety, depth, and patterns of user experiences rather than frequency or representativeness.

Results

Distinct Viewing Modes

During the interviews, the participants described distinct viewing modes for the two current affairs shows. DS was typically described as part of the routine of lean-back TV viewing around dinnertime, as Carmen (25) illustrated,

> Usually when I get home I turn on the TV and usually it begins at 06:30 p.m., I think. And then it's on in the background, but then I'm also cooking and [unpacking] the groceries, so doing all kinds of things at home, and then if it's really interesting I will watch a bit, but it's not like I think "Now I'm gonna sit down for it and now I'm really gonna watch DS."

Illustrative for how viewing DS is an act intertwined with dinnertime activities is that even regular DS viewers did not know its exact time of broadcast, referring to it as being on "after the 6 o'clock news" (Tina, 62) or "between 6 and 7" (Anthony, 60). The participants praised how viewing DS did not require a great amount of cognitive effort. Maggie (32) said, "For me it's the moment just before dinner. . . . It's not brought too heavy with all kinds of calculations and things you really have to pay attention to in order to follow it." She enjoyed the "pleasant" tone of one item and compared it with more serious talk shows such as WS, "You see images, you see [the city], you see water. That gives a different atmosphere, that's a lot different from a table where six men in suits are . . . talking." The DS viewers seemed to prefer items that they could easily make sense of and that frequently offered new entry points for captivation by having a considerate pace and a variety of elements, such as different sources (experts, laypersons), infographics, and outdoor shots.

WS, on the contrary, was described as appointment television by the viewers: They consciously sit down for it in a concentrated lean-forward mode. WS viewers were willing to put time and effort in watching the show in exchange for learning something new about politics. They were also outspoken about how they did not expect politics to be discussed in a light or entertaining way. Indeed, as Gianni (25) suggests, while its sober format and lengthy interviews sometimes make the show "teeter on the brink of becoming boring," this is exactly what one "sign[s] up for when you watch WS." The WS viewers described how they watch the show attentively as their default mode, and only when an item truly bores them, they temporarily shift their attention toward their newspaper, tablet, or smartphone, and back to the show when their interest is piqued again. Tom (28) described how when losing interest due to guests' lack of expertise about a topic, he keeps listening with "half an ear," receptive to having "a good question" refocus his attention. Boredom, in this case, is not caused by lack of visually pleasant, easy-to-process material, but by not being cognitively stimulated.

Election Talk

Despite the distinct viewing modes and expectations, viewers from both groups—across the board—said they were least captivated by one phenomenon: predictable, self-serving election talk of politicians, or, as described by Coleman & Moss's (2016: 10) participants, "politicians' answers":

> And if it becomes really political, really that campaign-like baloney, then I tune out. Then I think yeah, I already know all of that. (Will, 22, WS)

> Sometimes they also have politicians who talk neatly, are totally preprogrammed . . ., so who don't say anything at all. (Albert, 66, WS)

> Everyone is going for their own party. It is not about what is true or not, it is about: what is convenient [for them] right now. And that's predictable. (Anthony, 60, DS)

> "The government is not doing it right, because we want to ensure more jobs, more security." Yeah sure! Election talk, election talk. So that [opposition leader] with his obligatory quote, that doesn't add much for me. (Annalise, 57, DS)

The DS viewers recognized such "election talk," especially "obligatory" quotes from opposition politicians, as the default format for political news. When asked to explain their dislike, most said they simply found it predictable and boring to watch. The WS viewers, in turn, disliked election talk because it was unproductive: It did not enable them to understand politics better. Rather than just criticizing, our method of watching and discussing several items with a variety of styles made it easier for the participants to point out or suggest formats or elements they did find captivating. The suggestions of each group form the remainder of this paper.

EenVandaag (daily current affairs show, DS)

The distinction between attraction and satisfaction found in earlier research (e.g., Costera Meijer, 2007; Stanca et al., 2013) came up repeatedly in the DS interviews. Multiple viewers argued that DS tends to report about politicians or people in powerful positions in a suggestive manner. Some downright disapproved of this, such as Christopher (22), who branded one item "prejudiced" about the performance of a minister: "It's not that I now think 'what a bad minister,' more like 'what a bad item' or 'what a subjective item.'" However, for most DS viewers, such items generated a paradoxical experience. They were quick to point out when items did not adhere to journalistic criteria such as objectivity and showing both sides of a story, and were, therefore, not "good journalism," but could separate this from what made "good TV." Walter (27) said of one item that "you could question" if it were even journalism because no one from the government was asked for a reaction, but when asked whether this impacted his "captivation," he answered, "That actually doesn't have much to do with it. . . . I think at least television-wise it's well done, and as a result I paid attention." Trudy (61) branded one item "tendentious" because she felt a (gay) politician was framed as "that weird gay," but argued she still preferred this over typical items with sound bites from talking heads: "[It makes me] a bit annoyed, like 'Geez, you can't do that,' [but] that's better than when you think 'Hello, boring, predictable.'"

If being boring is the worst offence for DS, suggestive or sensational items were not experienced as entirely satisfying either. While discussing the items, the participants proposed a set of alternative journalistic approaches where captivation and satisfaction did seem to overlap. These patterns were found across ages, levels of education, interest in news, and frequencies of watching the show. We labeled the approaches empathetic, explanatory, and constructive.

Empathetic Approach

Corresponding to their strong dislike of "election talk," the DS viewers appreciated approaches that allowed politicians to show a more human, relatable side of themselves, a look "beyond the plastic sheet" (Coleman & Moss 2016: 11) that invited feelings of "relatedness" (Ryan & Deci 2000) or empathy or compassion (Oliver et al., 2012). In one item about the lack of secretary assistance for the Department of Defense, a former minister said, "I have failed in my efforts for the . . . soldiers and I'm terribly sorry about that. I felt a lot for them and was strongly committed to them, and I couldn't sufficiently live up to that." This self-critique impressed Jamie (27), who noted that this "actually grabs me more than those very bureaucratic interviews [shown] before." Likewise, Eveline (27) noted,

> That he himself also says, "I could have done a better job and done [my job] to more satisfaction if I'd had [a secretary] next to me." Well, that does have impact. That's more interesting to me than an item about two fighting party members.

It appears the DS viewers want to see politicians more as "real" people, rather than as flat characters, firmly set up by journalists in a strict role as adversarial politicians. Being more "human" also includes using accessible language that makes complicated political matters understandable. Ida (79) noted how instead of hearing "only that dry political talk," she wants "a nice comparison that makes you think, 'that's exactly how it is.'" Politicians should use the clear language of "normal people" who in vox pops "just tell it like it is."

The DS viewers also praised hearing larger political issues through exemplars of "normal" people. For instance, Molly (23) was grabbed by an item about the impact of an earthquake caused by the government-controlled gas winning. She was especially struck by the small detail of how a man numbered planks of a damaged church so he would be able to restore the building:

> I thought it was really beautiful to see that those people care so much that he even says he will number the planks so he can put them back the same way. . . . You notice

> that those people really have a lot of heart for the place they live in. So that's why maybe I have more attention for it.

The small but telling detail invoked feelings of empathy and made her pay attention, arguably resulting in "transportation" (Green & Brock, 2000) into the story. Bonnie (25) described similar feelings after watching an item about parental contribution to child psychiatry told from a mother's perspective:

> I could follow it better because it also captured [my] imagination, . . . that you really see it happening, that it could really be about the neighbor who has a child with a disorder, or your aunt with a niece.

Jaden (26) became so immersed that he wanted to know how the story ended:

> Because that woman explains it, you are sucked in the story much more and it grabs you much more. . . . Because of that I find it easier to concentrate. . . . You hear that woman talk and then you're kind of curious about how it's going and maybe [you] hope there's sort of a closure to it.

Jaden acknowledged the subjectivity of the mother's perspective, but this did not interrupt the pleasant experience of transportation: "I don't know if because of that it's still very objective, but I do think it's nice."

However, other DS viewers did miss hearing the policy or politician's side of exemplars. Regarding an item about a man left with cancer after he worked with poisonous chrome-6 paint for the Defense Department, Ronny (32) lost his attention because the victim angle was too dominant:

> At some point you start to notice that they mention carcinogen for the tenth time and "hundreds of people," "lethal substances," "chrome-6" . . . and then I think, yeah, that it loses its credibility a bit. And then you start to look at it differently. Then it's not "gosh, I'm curious to see where this is going" [laughs] then you're turned off a little bit because you think, "Yeah, yeah, yeah, sad, sad, sad, death death blablabla." And then you only get gripped a bit toward the end when they let that [minister] Hennis speak and then it's so underexposed that you think, "oh, then just leave it" [laughs].

The lack of different perspectives hindered Ronny's captivation and made him critically assess the story. While not defending the minister, Ronny said he wanted to hear from her "how it really is," arguing that her side of the argument might be more rational or justifiable than the item suggests. Nancy (27) criticized the same story for casting

the minister as "a kind of bogeywoman" in a predetermined conflict frame, in effect disabling her to judge for herself if this portrayal was justified. Mathilda (36) likewise criticized the archetypical representation of events: "The minister quickly becomes the big bad witch."

Regarding the item about the mother and her sick child, Carmen (25) noted that the "explanation" of the policy "did not come to fruition":

> Maybe it's me, but I got the impression that it didn't become so clear . . . why [the state secretary] wanted this. And what the proponents of this policy think. I always understand that the money for these kinds of problems has to come from somewhere.

Joanne (63) said she mentally tuned out during an item about a town affected by European Union (EU)-imposed restrictions on fishing. The victim angle was clear enough, but the law was not adequately explained:

> Especially when those [inhabitants] themselves were talking, "Yeah we voted PVV [Dutch right-wing populist party] because there's all kinds of rules and changes that dupe us," well OK, but it stays a bit unclear how that works exactly and why they prohibit that fishing.

Although the DS viewers did enjoy and value the show's empathetic attitude toward "normal" people, some noticed the same courtesy was not extended to the politicians involved. This lack of attention to the possible reasonableness or justifiability of political decisions not only made these viewers rate the items lower in terms of journalistic quality but, as illustrated by Ronny and Joanne, also made them less captivating.

Explanatory Approach

Most DS viewers did not find politics particularly interesting. We were therefore surprised to learn that their interest could be awakened by an explanatory approach to politics. That is, the viewers described feeling captivated when they felt items increased their understanding of how politics work and how it matters. Regarding the topic of European elections, Harry (61) said he did not want to hear "about how the European Commission is imposing fines again," but about "what these people do for Europe, what benefits we get from that." Annalise (57) similarly appreciated getting a basic understanding of how politics work. When asked which of the three items she watched was most captivating, she pointed to a "refresher" of how the Dutch system of provincial politics works:

> Actually [this topic is] the most boring to me, but how our country is governed, that was the most informative to me, because I knew that the least. I had realized the least how exactly it fits together.

Remarkably considering the "most boring" character of these provincial politics, she became captivated when their workings were explained. Likewise, when asked how he would go about making an item about provincial politics if he were a journalist, Harry replied,

> I would make an item . . . to show what those people actually do in that building, you know. What is it exactly, the "States-Provincial," what do they do for the country, what do they do for the province, and is it actually important what they do?

Similarly, when asked how she would improve the item she found least captivating, Bonnie (25) suggested,

> Maybe they should have zoomed in more on what [criticism of a politician's functioning] really means in practice. . . . Then you also understand it better, then you don't have to make that translation yourself from: what does this talk about his abilities actually mean for, say, you and me?

To be captivated, many DS viewers needed to understand the significance and impact of the news development. After viewing an item about two politicians battling for party leadership, Eveline (27, DS) argued that the focus on "the power game" and "who is [doing] the best in the polls" takes for granted more fundamental information about politics that she needed to comprehend the bigger picture,

> With politics we always pretend like everyone knows exactly what parties stand for, or what people within that party stand for individually, but actually we don't really know. That would be interesting, . . . to make small profiles of the two people [aiming for party leadership] and to show: this is so and so, background so and so, this is what she wants to do with that party. . . . Then at least I'd get an idea of that person instead of only getting to know that number one and two are fighting with each other.

However, this does not necessarily mean that Eveline would stop watching this item about bickering politicians: "It is fun TV, in principle I would watch it, but it's not like I learned something or think 'that's how it is.'" Just because she appreciates learning about politics does not mean she does not enjoy the dramatics of these items. Yet,

while the focus on the competition element may not be a reason to tune out, it did not give her the aha-erlebnis that the item about the self-critical minister (mentioned earlier) gave her. This is a very crucial distinction: Unlike the one about the bickering politicians, this item left her wanting more and, so she claimed, stimulated her to look for more information.

Constructive Approach

Finally, in a step beyond explanation, some viewers were interested in constructive, solution-driven approaches. Regarding an item about corrupt politicians, Monique (60) said,

> When will I hear that the municipalities actually did something about this? That's what I want to hear. It always remains a bit vague for me, these kinds of items. . . . It's an item that solves nothing.

Monique argued that the item "does not add much" because it only addresses a known problem rather than give insight into a possible solution. What is more, she suggested that due to journalism's [over]emphasis on corruption and misconduct, her "trust in politics goes down every year." Regarding the same item, Ramon (32) even argued that EenVandaag adds fuel to the fire: "They say trust in politicians isn't very high and . . . then they even exaggerate it a bit, and I'm like, you're not helping." While he did label the item "tasty sensation," he argued that it missed an action perspective,

> Sure, it's tasty. Uh yeah, I think I would've preferred if it . . . had more of a prospect, like: OK, all politicians are not to be trusted, but what are we going to do about it?

Importantly, Ronny did enjoy and laugh at the sensational parts of the item, but it offered no recourse. As he summarized, "It's catchy, but it gets you fucking nowhere." Mathilda (36) similarly admitted this item was "tasty" and "captivating" because there was "malicious pleasure" in it. Yet, she had a bit of an inner struggle with this: "That can be very fun, but that's not what I'm looking for in a show like this . . . I get the feeling that I'm manipulated instead of informed honestly." She claimed to be most captivated by an item that explained the background and the consequences of a policy measure regarding health care. Trudy (61) proposed a constructive alternative to predicable quotes from opposition politicians: Reporters could ask "what would you have done better?" or provide analysis: "They said this and this in their party program . . . and for this and this reason they did or did not achieve that."

It appears most DS viewers can both "enjoy" a fun, sensational item and "appreciate" a meaningful, moving, or thought-provoking item (e.g., Oliver & Bartsch 2012). This means that although sensational news—even if not considered good journalism—is enjoyable to watch, DS viewers appreciate items more if they explain basic workings of politics and their impact on society in an entertaining, accessible, constructive manner. Indeed, Christopher (22) became almost jubilant when watching an item that included alternating shots, interviews with different types of sources, tempo, and some funny moments, and explained why the subject mattered:

> It's chill, like, it's edited nicely . . . There's just a nice dynamic in it. . . . I'll keep watching, they bring the subject in an interesting way and they also make it relevant, like: . . . why those elections are so important, because now as a viewer you understand: OK, so that's what it's about, OK . . . so that's what's nice about the item.

Buitenhof (weekly political interview show, WS)

Unlike the DS viewers, the WS viewers are intrinsically interested in politics and want to understand complex political matters. This explains why they so strongly disliked election talk. As Will (22) suggested in his quote ("I already know all of that"), predictable self-serving talk is a mental "tune out" moment because it does not add new insights to their existing political knowledge. Their desire to understand politics is illustrated, first, by their appreciation of critical one-on-one interviews with appropriate political guests. While the DS viewers applauded the inclusion of popular opinion or vox pop, the WS viewers emphasized the essential expertise of the guests: "people who have sufficient authority to fill an in-depth background item" (Tom, 28). Albert (66) praised an interview with "a very knowledgeable person who gives good answers and [an] enlightening vision," and who was interviewed "critically" and whose arguments were "countered" by the interviewer.

Second, although the WS viewers wanted guests to be questioned critically, these counters had to generate thoughtful, informative responses. Ideally, politicians would be "contemplative and reflective" and "show the human [side] a little more, the[ir] convictions, not the flat story" (Yvette, 71), but multiple viewers acknowledged the difficulty of getting politicians into this "space." Maria (24), who referenced an item in which the presenter questioned the chief of the Dutch national police aggressively, illustrates how not allowing enough space for explanation resulted in a less than informative interview,

> Very attacking questions were asked to [chief police], . . . where [he] constantly had to be on the defensive rather than really being able to say what he wanted to say. So instead of being asked triggering questions [inviting him] to explain [things] in detail, it was actually a bit of attack-defense.

Similarly, Johnny (31) missed hearing "the other side of the story" in a one-on-one interview with a guest who was in conflict with a large organization. Remarkably, because of its dominance in journalism, the debate format would not have been a solution, so Johnny argued. That likely would have resulted in "an endless discussion where you still don't actually get to hear any information, but just a yes-no game." Instead, Johnny said he preferred hearing the full story through the presenter. He did want to learn the considerations and reasons of the other party, but putting them up against each other would not have enabled a better understanding of the situation. Confirming Costera Meijer's (2001) previous findings about the limitations of the debate format, Sean (26) said he "would've never watched" a debate between two guests from opposite sides of the political spectrum,

> Because you know you're not going to learn anything, you'll never get new insights, it's not going to change your own conceptions, and it is the pretense of balance by putting two extremes together.

Even viewers who did prefer debates to one-on-one interviews did not appreciate conflict in itself. Ada (59): "It shouldn't become a quarrel, they have to stay respectful. Ideally you'd want one [guest] being able to convince the other." Yvette (71) similarly argued that she "finds it captivating when they disagree with each other when they also substantiate that in a good way."

The WS viewers' desire to better understand politics is further reflected by their enthusiasm for fresh perspectives or surprising angles. As noted by Will (22), "Recently they had this young leader or something from Syriza, you know, that Greek party, and I thought, 'Wow, that is interesting, that is a new perspective.'" Fourth, the WS viewers became disappointed when interviews did not reach their potential due to presenters "not doing their job." They expected presenters to facilitate their learning process by clearly introducing and rounding off topics, summarizing the guests' main points, clearing up terms that might be confusing, and keeping the conversation "on topic." Maja's (56) last remark is telling. She became disappointed because she had not learned anything from the interview, which left her unsatisfied:

> She [the anchor] lets him talk for a long time and at some point she starts talking about something else, like "OK well, we will see. Now [onto] something else . . ." Well, I find that unsatisfactory, like, what will we see? This has left me none the wiser.

Tim (32) was also dissatisfied. He was unable to keep up with an interview about the health care system because the presenter did not clarify complex terms,

> They quickly go into content we don't know much about, like all kinds of premiums. I heard something about contracted and non-contracted care policies . . . that's like "Hello, wait a second." . . . They didn't ask what it was, they didn't say what [it was], so I was still curious [what it was] when he was already going on about it.

Whether learning something new or informing their opinion, for WS viewers, there has to be a takeaway from the viewing experience—it has to have been worth watching the show. They do not watch WS as a mood elevator or to hear "background noise" (Lull 1990: 36), but invest time and effort into the viewing experience on the condition of getting new perspectives and a deeper understanding of politics in return. The WS viewers do find politics intrinsically interesting but can be turned off by an approach that does not yield enlightenment.

Conclusion

This paper explored how political information can be told in such a way viewers experience it as captivating. In particular, we sought to move beyond the "double viewing paradox" (Costera Meijer 2007) and bridge the gap between what attracts the attention of viewers and what satisfies them. While our results show what viewers describe as captivating current affairs TV, additional research is necessary to find out whether people actually tune in when shows cater to these experiences. Our user-centered approach has resulted in two sets of bottom–up, user-defined, quality criteria for current affairs TV. For DS viewers, attraction and satisfaction overlapped when items were empathetic to all sides of the story, explained how politics work and impact society, and had a constructive, solution-driven angle. To be captivating, these approaches must be combined with a varied and easy-to-follow production style, including different perspectives, outdoor shots, considerable pacing, and a clear storyline. For WS viewers, attraction and satisfaction overlapped when they felt they learned about and understood complex political issues. This was achieved through presenters who guarded the structure of the interviews, through critical interviews with relevant and knowledgeable guests who provided insightful answers, and through new and inspiring perspectives.

The patterns within each group were found across age, level of education, frequency of watching, and interest in news, although it should be noted that participants were not systematically selected based on these characteristics. Additional research is needed to establish why, for instance, some viewers felt transported into exemplar stories while others criticized their one-sidedness. The fact that between the groups, participants were alike in age and level of education but differed in (self-proclaimed) interest in politics might point to the importance of the latter characteristic. Alternatively, differences between the groups might also be due to the distinct viewing modes and accompanying expectations the shows invite (lean-back viewing versus lean-forward appointment television). Future research could have the same (homogeneous) group of viewers watch several different shows rather than select viewers based on their (potential) affinity with each show. Although this research was done in a Dutch context, we might reasonably expect that the DS experiences might be more generally valid for general interest shows, whereas the WS experiences might be valid for serious (interview) shows aiming for a more politically interested audience.

Our finding that both groups of viewers greatly appreciate a learning experience deserves emphasis; in particular, we want to underline the pleasure they derived from it. As the aha-erlebnis illustrates, finally understanding something is experienced as a true moment of delight. Our results also suggest that what viewers want from political journalism might differ from what journalists produce yet is perfectly compatible with their democratic remit. Viewers' appreciation of meaningful, inspiring, thought-provoking items and their willingness to learn suggests that there is a demand for the journalistic function Schudson (2008) called "publicizing representative democracy." This function of journalism is about explaining how political institutions work and when necessary, criticizing them in a constructive way. Constructive criticism is experienced as captivating when it also asks solution-oriented questions and elicits understanding for all sides of an event instead of providing an "us versus them" perspective. Items that fail to make the "political" side of the story comprehensible do not only "other" politicians (Richardson et al., 2012) but also miss an informative and captivating variety of perspectives. Future research should further explore how news organizations could best explain the workings of politics to both less and more informed audiences. Following Coleman and Ross (2010: 149), we argue that providing such explanation is not "dumbing down" but rather "a form of hospitality."

It should be emphasized that the method employed depends on participants' own reflections on their captivation. Although our participants' openness about their enjoyment of sensational aspects suggests they felt relatively at ease to talk about their experiences, interviewing people about something as normatively loaded as current affairs bears the risk of social desirability. While the interviews took place in

the participants' homes, exposure to the viewing material was forced in the sense that participants were asked to sit through full items. In addition, rather than watching entire episodes of the current affairs shows, participants were shown a selection of items. Future research might explore how viewers experience the composition of a full show and try to establish, for instance, how many explanatory items viewers can handle and whether every story should be catchy and constructive.

5

CHAPTER 6

Material and sensory dimensions of everyday news use

Groot Kormelink, T & Costera Meijer, I (2019)
"Material and sensory dimensions of everyday news use."
Media, Culture & Society 41(5): 637–653.

> It is a weird way of reading, and I THINK that digital medium invites that. [...] You don't have that whole page in front of you so with that mouse you constantly have to select a piece of text.

Our participant Fiona was surprised to learn that when she reads her e-paper on her (large) laptop, she sometimes starts reading in the middle of an article. Not because she chooses to, but because she uses her mouse to navigate: the text of the e-paper is too small to read without zooming in, but the mouse makes it difficult 'blow up' a specific piece of text. As a result, she sometimes reads articles in a random, fragmented order. This example illustrates the importance of taking material and sensory dimensions into account when studying everyday news use. To begin with, fragmented reading could have major consequences for people's understanding and interpretation of news. Yet, within media and journalism studies, the relation between news media as material objects and news users' sensory experiences of them has been virtually overlooked, especially in an everyday context (for an exception, see Fortunati et al., 2015). In this paper, we therefore seek to capture the material and sensory dimensions of people's everyday news use and make sense of their significance.

In focusing on materiality and sensory experiences, this paper answers recent calls for non-representational and non-media-centric approaches to media use (Couldry, 2012; Moores, 2012). Non-representational theory (NRT) is an umbrella term whose principles include shifting attention from cognition to the pre-cognitive (or non-cognitive), focusing on practices, giving equal weight to (material) things, and stressing affect and sensation (Thrift, 2008). In line with NRT's focus on practices, non-media-centric approaches seek to understand how everyday media practices are integrated into and intertwined with other everyday practices (Couldry, 2012; Moores, 2012).

A key contribution of a non-representational (and non-media-centric) approach to studying media is its emphasis how material and sensory aspects of media practices are central to processes of mediation (Couldry & Hepp, 2016; Pink, 2015a). If one seeks to understand how social reality is created, one must look at the *interrelation* of symbolic and material (and sensory) dimensions of everyday media practices (Couldry & Hepp, 2016). It is therefore somewhat alarming that within journalism studies, user research has concerned itself mostly with the former, focusing on the cognition and interpretation of content. News users are typically conceived of as disembodied, cognitive beings whose devices and platforms are neutral conduits of information. Uses and Gratifications Theory, for instance, aims to explain how people actively seek out media to fulfil particular social and psychological needs (Katz et al., 1973), while Hall's (1973) influential encoding/decoding model looks at how people interpret messages. Although studies approaching news use as a ritual do center on the routinized and therefore often

automatic, subconscious character of everyday news practices (Bird, 2011; Couldry, 2004; Madianou, 2009; Silverstone, 1994), here, too, the sensory experiences involved are largely overlooked.

In alignment with non-representational theory, rather than focusing on cognition, in this paper we depart from people's embodied ways of knowing: knowledge they may not be able to produce off the top of their head but "know" in their body (Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Moores, 2015; Pink & Leder Mackley, 2013). Our research therefore also responds to recent calls for more attention to haptic dimensions of media use (Parisi et al., 2017) and the embodied ways of knowing involved (Richardson & Hjorth, 2017). We also draw from postphenomenology, which is similarly concerned with the relation between technological objects and users' experience of them (Ihde, 2008; Verbeek, 2005). We first describe how we developed a method – the *two-sided video-ethnography* – that makes visible and thus researchable people's tacit, embodied knowledge of their news use. Second, we show how the materiality of devices and platforms and people's sensory, embodied experiences of them influence how they engage with news, in ways even they themselves had not realized. After illustrating additional unexpected findings, we discuss the theoretical, epistemological and methodological implications of our research.

Studying news use: Non-representational, non-media-centric, and non-news-centric

As suggested above, a non-representational approach to studying news use has at least four implications. First, it requires a shift from cognition toward embodied ways of knowing (Moores, 2012; Thrift, 2008). The approach starts from the idea that people *"know as they go"*, as their bodies move (and feel) through environments (Ingold, 2011: 154). Pink & Leder Mackley (2013) capture the responsive, know-as-they-go character of embodied knowing well when they argue that people's routes and routines are "habitual and learned, known in the body, while part of a process of ongoing, continual learning that […] is sensitive to the contingencies of the environment and its affordances" (683). These ideas can also be applied to how people (learn how to) use media. Drawing on Merleau-Ponty's (1962: 144) "knowledge in the hands," Moores (2014) argues that when people (start to) use a digital medium, they (literally) *feel* their way through the material object itself *and* the online environments it provides access to. To illustrate, he describes how he has come to know his way around his email inbox just as his hands have gotten to know their way around his keyboard (Moores, 2014). Because such knowledge is embodied and accessed only when put into practice, it is difficult to transfer without being in-situ and in-process; as a result, this source of knowledge about news use has remained largely untapped.

Second, a non-representational approach shifts attention from how news users make sense of media messages toward people's actual everyday news practices. The shift also aligns with a non-media-centric approach looking at how practices of media use are intertwined with other everyday practices (Couldry, 2012; Moores, 2012). In order to properly grasp how information is received, one must first understand what people actually *do* with, in and around media (Couldry, 2004). Couldry (2011) proposes three dimensions of audience practice worth looking at: *texture* ("the rhythms, density, and patterning" (223) of people's practices); *contents* (particularly people's trajectories across different media); and *wider uses and purposes* associated with media practices.

While already implicit in these three dimensions of practice, we argue that when studying everyday news use, it is necessary to emphasize a third "non-centric" approach: *non-news-centric*. News has become all but completely interwoven with other types of information; for instance, when doing a "checking cycle" (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015) on their smartphone, people check news sites or apps, social media, dating apps, etc. all in one go. Likewise, in social media news feeds, news is but one of a many information types. As a result, newer forms of digital news use can no longer be understood in their "pure", isolated form.

The final implications of a non-representational approach to news use concern a focus on both material "things" and people's sensory and affective experiences of them. As noted, the sensory, embodied experience of news use has been especially overlooked. A notable exception is Fortunati et al. (2015), who show how the material qualities of news media impact users' experience. For instance, whereas print represented "pleasantness" to their participants, online media were associated with "a sensation of coldness" (Fortunati et al., 2015: 841). Due to their different physical nature, print newspapers were also manipulated, controlled and mastered differently than online newspapers (Fortunati et al., 2015). Zerba's (2011) participants noted material disadvantages of print newspapers, including the effort of reading ("flipping pages, holding, folding, and carrying") (602) and recycling. Benefits of online news seemed to have less to do with tactile dimensions and more with the technological affordances of digital media, allowing for instantaneity, up-to-dateness, and interaction (Fortunati et al., 2015; Zerba, 2011). Ytre-Arne (2011) discovered through focus groups that readers of women's magazines associated the glossy print version with feelings of relaxation and comfort, whereas computers were associated with work and clicking was found "annoying and tiresome" (471).

Especially relevant to our research is postphenomenology's notion of "multistability", which recognizes that technologies mediate our experiences and practices by enabling some actions and constraining others, while simultaneously emphasizing that different people can use, manipulate and interpret technologies in

different ways (Ihde, 2008; Rosenberger & Verbeek, 2015). In an effort to move beyond the enable-constrain binary suggested in affordance theory, Davis & Chouinard (2017) propose that artifacts can "request, demand, allow, encourage, discourage, and refuse" actions. They also emphasize how people's experiences of affordances depend on their "perception" (awareness) and "dexterity" (knowledge), and on "cultural and institutional legitimacy". Their conceptual vocabulary serves as a helpful starting point for making sense of how news users experience and interact with their news media as material objects.

Developing the two-sided video-ethnography

As Deuze (2011: 138) argues, people live "in, rather than with, media" (Deuze, 201: 138), and therefore do not always recognize their own media habits. This makes methods that rely on people's own perceptions and reflections (surveys, interviews, diaries) less suitable for studying material and sensory dimensions of news use; at least the tacit, automatic and habitual micro-processes we are interested in. Experiments – even those approximating a natural setting (e.g., Kruikemeier et al., 2018; Neijens & Voorveld, 2016; Segijn, 2016) – are also unsuitable for our research aims because the devices used are not the participants' own, and consequently the *learned* character of embodied knowledge is not captured. The think-aloud protocol partly overcomes these limitations but ultimately is unsuitable because it interrupts the flow of people's news use (cf. Chapter 4). We also tested "video re-enactment", having participants perform their news practices on camera as they normally would while commenting and answering questions from the researcher (Pink & Leder Mackley, 2013). However, this proved less appropriate for our research aims because 1) it interrupted the flow of news use, forcing participants to stop and reflect on movements they usually do very quickly or automatically; 2) while commenting on their practices, participants used gestures related to the realm of explanation rather than to their news use.

In order to bring material and sensory dimensions of everyday news use into view, a new method was needed. We devised, tested and refined a method that first captures people's news use in real time and then allows them to 'look in' and reflect on it (cf. Lahlou, 2011): the "two-sided video-ethnography". It consists of five steps. First, we filmed participants from *two* sides simultaneously while they used news: a frontal perspective to capture participants' position, posture, gestures and expressions, and an over-the-shoulder perspective to capture the content of the news as well people's trajectories in and physical handling of their devices. Second, we watched and made sense of the videos with each participant individually, having them comment on and clarify their actions. Third, we analyzed the videos and transcripts. The analysis was

characterized by constant comparison between data and analysis (cf. Corbin & Strauss, 1990). Following postphenomenology, our research process departed from first-person experience (as is central to phenomenology), but also included "intersubjective checking and critique", making it "experiential, but not 'subjectivistic'" (Ihde, 2008: 6). This collaborative nature of our analysis proved important: discussing interpretations of the data between researchers significantly moved forward the analysis. Fourth, we shared our interpretations with the participants to see if they could elaborate on them. This step proved especially helpful for making sense of the significance of our participants' practices and (micro-)gestures. Finally, we adapted and improved our analyses accordingly.

We combined the two-sided video-ethnographies with day-in-your-life interviews, which were held immediately prior to filming. Participants were asked to take the researcher through a typical day of news use: "Imagine it's morning, your alarm goes off. What is the first moment you encounter news?", followed repeatedly by "What is the next moment you encounter news?" Going through their day chronologically allowed participants to envisage their news use, resulting in a vivid account of their news routines. Whereas video-ethnography was useful for zooming in on "hidden" dimensions, the day-in-the-life method captured overall patterns of news use.

We selected thirteen participants through purposeful sampling (Patton, 1990). As we are especially interested in material and sensory dimensions of news use, we selected participants so as to include a variety of devices (newspaper, computer, smartphone, tablet, TV) and platforms (website, app, e-paper, Facebook, Twitter) (see table 1). We opted for a location where we could easily capture diverse news practices: the home. Our approach was user-centered: we filmed only practices participants actually engage in, including *when* and *where* they engage in them. We selected participants from and through the social circle of the first researcher: First, a "relationship of trust" (Madianou, 2010: 434) is necessary when engaging in ethnography, especially when filming people during intimate moments, including in the morning while wearing pajamas. Second, because the research process (including the day-in-your-life interview, filming the practice(s), watching and discussing the recordings) is time-consuming, participants must be willing to put in time and effort. Third, as we shared our findings with our participants – sometimes repeatedly – it was important that they were easily reachable. All participants live in the Netherlands, a country characterized by high internet penetration (95%) and online news use (79%). The limitations of this selection process are abundantly clear. Most notably, our sample is dominated by young, well-educated people. However, our goal is not to be representative but to explore the various material and sensory dimensions involved in everyday news use.

Table 1. Participants in two-sided video-ethnography.

Participants			Filmed news practice(s)		
Name (anonymized)	Age	Gender	Device	Platform/title	Length (filmed news practice only)
Kevin	29	M	Smartphone	Newsapp (NOS)	00:12:56*
			Print newspaper	De Volkskrant	00:27:02
Norah	31	F	Print newspaper	Het Parool	00:50:03*
			Tablet	E-paper (Het Parool)	00:22:29
Ferdinand	30	M	Smartphone	Facebook (app)	00:11:02
Regina	29	F	Smartphone	Newsapp (Nu.nl); Twitter (app)	00:08:11
Julie	28	F	Laptop	Websites (Facebook, news sites, other)	00:09:14
Martin	32	M	Smartphone	Newsapp (Nu.nl); Instagram (app)	00:03:27
Fiona	60	F	Laptop	E-paper (De Volkskrant)	00:21:45
			Print newspaper	NRC Handelsblad	00:16:50
Joanne	32	F	Print newspaper	De Gelderlander	00:17:16
Robert	31	M	Smartphone	Newsapps (multiple)	00:13:52
Melanie	28	F	Laptop	Websites (blogs, De Correspondent)	00:24:16
Myra	29	Non-binary	Computer	Websites (Facebook, blogs, other)	00:27:42
Marie	29	F	Television	NOS Journaal (Morning bulletin)	00:08:56
Layla	31	F	Television	NOS Journaal (Morning bulletin)	00:08:56

** Indicates "video re-enactment" (test phase) and therefore includes time spent on (contemporaneous) commentary by participant and researcher.*

Results

First, our method enabled us to capture the sensory, embodied experiences of our participants. As evidenced by their use of such phrases such as "I hadn't realized", the video-ethnography made visible and thus discussable tacit, habitual and automatic dimensions of their news use. Especially notable were the subtle micro-gestures involved in efficiently handling and navigating their devices. Their hands were often future-oriented, already anticipating the next move, even while their cognitive focus was still directed toward the information at hand. A common example is how the participants already grabbed the lower-right corner of the newspaper while still reading the current page. When asked about this, Joanne suspected she did this because "while reading you can easily already do that, you don't have to think about it and then when you're ready you can *immediately* move on". Similarly, after Kevin turned his phone horizontally to make the news video he was watching bigger, he turned it back vertically before the video had finished, explaining that he was "already anticipating that I go back to the list [of headlines]". Robert swiped his left forefinger upward shortly after opening a news app on his smartphone, to ensure he saw the very latest headlines.

Material matters

Capturing the material and sensory aspects of news use matters because, first, the way our participants (physically) handle news devices and interfaces affects how they engage with news. Their devices and platforms invite or inhibit participants' actions in ways they themselves were usually not aware of. This was most evident in the example that opened this article: Fiona's use of her print newspaper and her e-paper (reads on her laptop). Similar to the respondents in Neijens & Voorveld's (2016) experiment, Fiona initially believed her reading style on both versions was the same: reading and skimming through articles linearly. While watching the recording of her e-paper use with her, however, we discovered that her mouse use impacted her reading style: she sometimes zoomed in and started reading at a seemingly random part of an article. When asked to clarify, she explained:

> It is a weird way of reading, and I THINK that digital medium invites that. [...] You don't have that whole page in front of you so with that mouse you constantly have to select a piece of text. [...] Do you get what I mean? Because of that zooming in with that mouse you constantly get a little piece of text, you have the tendency to constantly select a little piece.

Fiona reads e-paper articles in a fragmented way; not because she desires or chooses to, but because the combination of her e-paper, her laptop and her mouse "demands" (Davis & Chouinard, 2017) it. By contrast, in her print newspaper she reads and skims articles linearly.

Second, the sensory and tactile dimensions involved in using *platforms* and their interfaces also affect how our participants physically engage with them and the content they contain. The most prominent example of this is the movements and micro-gestures involved in using Facebook. Indeed, we identified a distinct user practice our participants engaged in Facebook: "scrolling". Scrolling is their default mode for Facebook on both smartphone and laptop, described by our participants in terms of a desire or – more precisely – an *urge* to "keep it going". Ferdinand, when asked why he made certain choices on Facebook, kept using phrases like "so let's just keep it going" and "so I just kept scrolling". Even stopping or pausing was experienced as an interruption:

> Should I click on the page? Because maybe there is something more interesting to read, but then I was just too *impatient* and *I kept scrolling, I didn't want to stop*.

The video also captured Ferdinand's embodied impatience when he *did* click to watch a video. After twenty seconds he briefly touched the screen to see how long the video was. When asked about this, he described this was not because he was bored, but rather because he longed to get back to the feed and keep it going:

> Yeah that moment I was already getting impatient and *wanted to move on*. […] I thought [the video] was really nice but *I don't wanna spend too much time doing it*. This is the moment I remember thinking that I was like 'ok, the information that I wanted is already [passed], *so I can keep scrolling*' but then I was like no maybe there is…

Ferdinand also described getting out of the scrolling flow as laborious. Upon encountering a BBC post in his feed, he hesitated for a moment, contemplating whether to visit the BBC page, before scrolling on. Asked why he had not clicked, he answered: "Too much work (laughs)".

Similarly, Julie paused at a Facebook video that started playing automatically, but then moved on because it did not have any subtitles and she did not want to click the sound button. This was not because she did not want to make noise, but because clicking was laborious:

> If there'd been text at the bottom […] I would've been more triggered to stay, you know, then I can consume the news without having to actually do ANOTHER action.

Apparently, when scrolling, one click is already considered too much work. It appears participants do not want to leave the flow of scrolling and feel they must get back to their feed as soon as possible when they do get out of it. Both participants stopped their scrolling practice when they became "bored" (Julie) or "tired" (Ferdinand).

(In)experience and mastery

It is important to emphasize that while devices and platforms invite or demand certain uses, our participants also use and manipulate them in ways beyond their designers' intention. Some participants showed far-going mastery of their devices and platforms through their manual dexterity. While watching her recording with her, we noticed that Regina used different fingers when *clicking* within her news app (right thumb) versus her Twitter-app (left forefinger). Emphasizing that she had been unaware of this, she explained that Twitter requires her to "click a little more precisely" to avoid accidently liking or retweeting a post. When *scrolling*, through both Facebook ("I pretty much only scroll on Facebook") and Twitter, she instead used her right thumb; except when she wants to quickly jump to the "top" of Twitter – then she uses her left forefinger because it works faster. Her micro-gestures are so natural and automatic to her that the smartphone has become an extension of her body, enabling her to optimize her news practices in terms of time investment. The Dutch expression for mastering something, "het in de vingers krijgen" ("getting it in the fingers"), certainly applies here.

For other participants, it was their lack of experience and mastery that shaped their news experience. This is illustrated by Norah, who had recently subscribed to a weekend paper. Reading it on Saturday morning, she became "satiated" after reading the first ten pages or so. The recording shows how she started leafing through the paper faster and faster, grabbing the corner of the next page as soon as she had turned the previous. She explained that at this point she was only scanning headlines. Notably, she *did* come across articles she did want to read, especially in the arts and science sections, but by that time, she had run out of time and concentration. When asked why she did not start with these sections that most appealed to her, she simply said this had never occurred to her: "It's so ingrained in your head, you start a book at the beginning too and then you leaf through it. You don't start in the middle". It was not the newspaper's particular materiality (print) that demanded this chronological order. When two weeks later we filmed Norah's use of the same title's e-paper version on her tablet, she – apparently having forgotten the researcher's suggestion – similarly remarked: "By the time I'm on page 18 about arts and media […] I'm actually already like so pfff tired of it that I go through it very quickly, so actually they should have this [section] at the beginning".

Following a (pre-determined) sequence was due to Norah's dominant reading practice of fiction and her *inexperience* as a newspaper reader. She read the paper as a book ("you start a book at the beginning [...] and then you leaf through it") and consequently it did not occur to her to follow an idiosyncratic route, the way more experienced newspaper readers might. Kevin, for instance, started with his weekend paper's light-hearted supplement because he wanted to go "from easy to difficult". Norah had neither the "perception" nor the "dexterity" to use these affordances of the newspaper (Davis & Chouinard, 2017). Instead, she seamlessly tapped into her knowledge of fiction reading. This negatively affected her reading experience, as she felt she needed to through the "bad" news on the first pages in order to get to the lighter supplements.

Norah's inexperience with the e-paper also negatively impacted her experience in a different way. Unaware of the option to make articles instantly more readable by clicking on them, she – again tapping into her knowledge of fiction reading – she zoomed in on articles as if moving the page closer to her face. The recording shows her continuously making wrong gestures while trying to zoom in and out. Once she even accidently "zoomed out" of the entire newspaper, which put her back at the front page, much to her frustration (and instead of jumping straight to the page she had zoomed out of, she – rather tellingly – again swiped through the entire paper to get there). In the follow-up interview she admitted she had not given the e-paper enough of a chance "to get used to it". As Tuan (1977: 9) notes, becoming experienced "requires that one venture forth into the unfamiliar and experiment with the elusive and the uncertain". For Norah, the e-paper was not worth this effort.

Deepening news user practices

In addition to shedding light on the interaction between news as material object and its users, capturing the material and sensory dimensions of news use also enables a fuller, deeper understanding of previously discovered everyday news user practices (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015). Following Moores (2012; 2015), we found the concepts of "wayfaring" and "inhabitant knowledge" (Ingold, 2000), particularly helpful. Consider Julie, who uses her laptop for news online through a practice we previously called "snacking": consuming "bits and pieces of information in a relaxed, easy-going fashion to gain a sense of what is going on" (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015: 670). By minutely following her movements, we realized this easy-goingness is in fact actively evoked and maintained. She manages her mood (Zillmann, 1988) by following familiar routes (visiting "feel good" websites) and expertly slaloming around negative content. While seemingly effortless, these movements in fact require *experience* and *skill*. First, Julie explores these online environments responsively, skillfully "feeling" her way as

she goes – both sensorially and affectively. When she watched a video on Facebook about Rio de Janeiro (which she had visited), she moved on as soon as she realized it was about pickpockets being beaten up: "Everything I experience as negative I scroll through as quickly as possible, because I don't want to, I don't need to experience that." It is worth emphasizing that feeling here refers to both Julie's emotional state and the movements of her hand: she quickly scrolled away when the news "hit" her. Second, routinely visiting a set of "feel good" websites, Julie has come to "inhabit" these online environments in the sense that she has learned exactly where to go to find the typical content she desires when snacking the news.

Wayfaring is like making a forest your own: not only do you learn which routes to go, but you also gain knowledge of its characteristics so you can make better choices as you go. It is not limited to any material: users can also create their own routes through newspapers, e.g., by starting at their favorite section. Yet, we did find that participants who used news websites on computers and laptops "roamed" more freely. Myra, for instance, repeatedly and effortlessly switched between websites on her iMac, using the constantly visible URL bar to jump to different websites and the tabs in her browser as shortcuts to her favorite "spots". Participants who used news apps on their smartphone, on the other hand, visited them in succession, moving onto the next one only when they were done with the previous. The material characteristics of news media, then, seem to afford different forms of movement. We might say that websites – by the mere availability and visibility of URL bars and tabs – "allow" constant change of direction making them more suitable for snacking, whereas apps "discourage" (Davis & Chouinard, 2017) this as it takes effort – closing one app and opening another – to do so.

Smartphone: seducer and enricher

Another news user practice deepened through our video-ethnography was "reading", which is "done individually, with great attention, [...] in longer sessions" (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015: 667). An eye-opener in particular was how interruptions from one's smartphone can be experienced as extension of the news experience rather than a distraction. On Saturday morning, Kevin aims to be fully immersed in the paper: "I try to force myself to not divide my attention between everything, multitasking is an illusion. [...] I'm like, otherwise I shouldn't do it, […] then there's no point". However, when we watched his recording, we saw that during his 24-minute reading session, he grabbed his phone three times:

1 to take a picture of an exhibition so he would remember it when later scrolling through his photo gallery (after which he checked his WhatsApp messages);
2 to take a picture of a headline and send it to a friend;

3 to check a push-notification that made his phone buzz: he received a WhatsApp-message and went on to check several group chats.

It might be tempting to conclude – as we initially did – that Kevin's reading practice was repeatedly interrupted by his smartphone. This is certainly true for the third time, when the phone demanded Kevin's attention by buzzing. Here Kevin described his phone as "seducing" him when he is less focused. His phone represents an ongoing stream of social information that apparently is hard to get away from. Stone (n.d.) coined the term "continuous partial attention" which she described as "motivated by a desire to be a LIVE node on the network."

However, in his follow-up interview Kevin clarified that he did *not* experience his first two interactions with his phone as interruptions. On the contrary, he saw them as "an extension" of the practice of reading, comparable to looking up an unclear term when reading news online. Illustrating the importance of asking users themselves how they experience technology and its affordances, Kevin's smartphone both "demanded" interruption and "allowed" (Davis & Chouinard, 2017) extension of his newspaper reading. While still "done individually, with great attention, [...] in longer sessions" (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015: 667), Kevin's reading is imbued with multiple social micro-processes that enrich his experience. His practice also emphasizes that although reading is about "immersion" (667), this is less about effective information processing than about allowing oneself the time to fully enjoy one's (ritual) practice, far beyond merely engaging with the text itself.

Minutely following Kevin's actions also allowed us to uncover (details of) the practice "sharing" that might be hard to capture with other methods. The recording showed him taking a picture of a news article and sending it to a friend using WhatsApp. As we looked more closely, the researcher noticed that the picture showed only a headline; it did not contain any other text his friend could actually read. Only when asked about this, Kevin said he knew his friend would never read the article, nor did he himself have any interest in reading it, but he just wanted to share that he had come across something his friend had mentioned a while ago. In the follow-up interview, Kevin further clarified that sharing the headline was not about sharing actual content – rather, it was about "just connecting" with his friend. This form of news sharing is an example of "phatic communications", which Miller (2008: 395) describes as follows:

> [...] although they may not always be "meaningless", they are almost always content-less in any substantive sense. The overall result is that in phatic media culture, content is not king, but "keeping in touch" is. More important than anything said, it

> is the connection to the other that becomes significant, and the exchange of words becomes superfluous.

Bycatch: making home through news

Through our two-sided video-ethnography we also generated insights that do not directly relate to the material, sensory angle of this paper, but that do concern affective dimensions of news use, therefore fitting within a non-representative approach. Specifically, we found the notion of place-making very helpful for understanding the significance of news use in people's home. Place-making describes how people – through their repeated practices and routines – eventually come to feel familiar in and ascribe meaning to environments (Ingold, 2000; Pink, 2012; Tuan, 1977). What we found is that news use not only co-constitutes place (Peters, 2012), but that people through their news practices also *create* a sense of space – of home. Seamon (1979: 70) defines "at-homeness" as "the usually unnoticed, taken-for-granted situation of being comfortable in and familiar with the everyday world in which one lives", but in the context of this paper we also use the concept more literally to denote feelings of warmth, safety and comfort people (can) associate with being inside their home. Our participants created a sense of home – or, in the words of Pink & Leder Mackley (2013), made their home "feel right" – through news in various ways, such as taking the time to fully immerse oneself in the beloved ritual of reading the newspaper (Fiona), or watching the morning news in bed to engage in a shared activity (Layla and Marie). These findings align with the ritual and thus (ultimately) reassuring function of news that is often emphasized (Silverstone, 1994). Yet, for some participants news played a more ambiguous role, sometimes also disrupting their feeling of at-homeness. We discuss two examples here.

Norah's video-ethnography uncovered an intriguing paradox between an ideal picture in her head that reading the weekend paper she had recently subscribed to "should" invoke and her actual experience while reading it. When she gets up on Saturday morning, she first makes breakfast which she eats in bed while watching series on Netflix. She was adamant about not reading the newspaper in bed; this space is reserved for "nice things instead of the troublesome things that news usually is." Only afterward she grabs the newspaper from the cabinet in the hallway – where her roommate has left it for her – and puts it on her living table.

> Because I think a newspaper belongs on the table, I just already think that's nice, like, you have a cozy living room and the fresh newspaper from today that is laying so beautifully crackling, unopened on the table waiting for me [...] and I grab a cup of coffee with it.

Spreading the newspaper out on her living room table is a place-making activity: it helps create a "cozy living room". Her phrasing "*belongs* on the table" implies that this is the correct way to read the newspaper. Despite noting the paper's "troublesome" content, Norah compared (when asked) her Saturday morning newspaper ritual to a breakfast buffet:

> In other words, there is a lot and you pick out the nice things that seem attractive to you and those you sit at the table to nicely read it, to munch on.

Her use of the words "attractive" and "nice" imply that reading the paper is a pleasurable activity. Her actual experience while reading suggests, however, that this ritual is an ideal she aspires to rather than a practice she enjoys herself. Most notably, she tried to skip negative content because it did not fit her sought-after mood on Saturday:

> Because here I'm already reading that 16% of women is raped, here I read that people are dying of hunger, you know, it is Saturday and I kind of have to keep my good spirits a bit. I'm a bit egotistical in that perhaps, but well, you can't carry all the suffering in the world on your shoulders.

Her justification for skipping negative content that "it is Saturday" is not insignificant. We argue that limiting her engagement with negative news can be interpreted as having a "place-making" as well as "*time*-making" function. She aims to construct a Saturday morning experience after a particular ideal picture of it: a time she apparently is supposed to be "in good spirits". News about suffering does not fit this picture. Norah also "makes time" by restricting her time with the paper. Whereas some other participants saw reading the paper as a treat, a moment to relax that they *allocated* time for, Norah *restricted* her time: she wants to spend a maximum of 30-45 minutes, and was acutely aware of the passing of time:

> Now that I'm discussing this consciously, I'm thinking jeez, it's pretty important what's on the first ten pages, because you kind of lose your attention and think, well, it's Saturday, we've already been reading for 45 minutes, I'm in the mood to go out to do things, go to the store.

Again she used Saturday as an explanation: she wanted to finish reading the paper and do what she was in the mood for: to go out.

The disconnect between the way Norah romanticized the ritual of Saturday morning reading and her less-than-enthusiastic actual experience, suggests that rather than being inherently interested in reading the news, it was the practice itself and

its supposedly place-making qualities that she valued. When carefully probed in our follow-up interview, Norah said that one of the reasons she subscribed to the newspaper was that it would be "homely, because of course back in the day at home with your parents you always had the newspaper too", referring to her parents cozy practice of reading the weekend paper at the kitchen table. Quite literally, Norah had thought of the newspaper as a homemaker. More than modeling after her parents' news habits (Edgerly et al., 2018), her attempt at this Saturday morning ritual was an effort to (re-) create a sense of home on a fundamental level: the nostalgia of yesteryear. However, the actual act of reading the newspaper disrupted this home-making. Norah eventually cancelled her subscription.

Safe space from which to venture out

For Melanie, news played a similarly ambiguous yet different role in creating a sense of home. After arriving back from work, Melanie divides her attention between The Gilmore Girls (GG) – a show she has seen several times – on her TV (Netflix), and news sites and blogs on her laptop. The recording shows Melanie averting her eyes constantly from laptop to TV and vice versa, revealing that she did not read any article from start to finish. Rather, she alternated reading parts of articles with catching parts of GG. Melanie's news practice, thus, is characterized by fragmentation; even though one of the sites she visits is Dutch news website De Correspondent, which typically has longer pieces one would assume to require a more concentrated mode of reading. When asked, Melanie explained she finds the news "too serious" to fully engage with, but she does "want to just check everything". Watching GG is also a fragmented activity: she only looks up when her favorite characters (Rory's circle) are on her TV screen; and goes back to her laptop screen when less favorite characters (like Emily) appear. Dividing her attention is not about "continuous partial attention" (Stone, n.d.), multitasking, or being efficient. Rather, re-watching GG creates a nice, homely, nostalgic, predictable, reassuring atmosphere that could best be described as "ontological security" (Giddens, 1991). In her follow-up interview Melanie confirmed that re-watching GG – unlike trying a new series – provides the homeliness and predictability she desires. The show is like a warm blanket from under which she can *then* safely peek into or have a sense of connection with the "serious" public world.

Conclusions

In this paper we captured and made sense of the material and sensory dimensions of everyday news use by employing the two-sided video-ethnography. Our first conclusion is that users are not only coaxed into certain behavior by carefully designed

interfaces (Van Dijck, 2013a), but that news devices and platforms also invite and inhibit different ways of *physically* – and often *manually* – handling and navigating them, resulting in different ways of engaging with news content. It is important to emphasize that our participants were typically unaware of this until we watched and discussed the recordings of their own news use.

Second, news users' mastery of devices and platforms – or lack thereof – impacts how optimized their news practices are in terms of time investment. Consequently, time cannot longer be taken as an unproblematic indicator of people's attention or interest in news: the more "practiced" the user, the more efficient their news use. Our third conclusion is that whether and how people make use of technologies' affordances is not only shaped by their perception and knowledge of the technology in question (Davis & Chouinard, 2017), but also their (prior) experience with *different* technologies. Note the participant that – against her wishes, in retrospect – read through both her print and e-paper chronologically, because she projected her book reading experiences onto them; she had been "primed" to read linearly. This example makes a non-news-centric approach especially relevant; not only for studying the adoption and "incorporation" (i.e. embodiment) of new news devices and platforms, but also for seeing whether news content becomes fully realized.

Fourth, contrary to the common assumption that smartphones distract from newspaper reading – as we also presumed – they are also used as an enrichment or an extension of the reading experience. This finding highlights the value of checking one's interpretations with the research participants in question. Five, we identified a new distinct user practice: *scrolling*, marked by a strong, embodied urge to keep up the movement of the hand and to not interrupt this flow by (what is experienced as) the laborious act of clicking, even when the user finds the content appealing. This warrants further attention to what it means when people say they use Facebook for news (Newman et al., 2018). Does it just pass by without making an impression or do they really pay attention to it?

Sixth, we found that people through their news practices actively *make place* and *time*. Especially notable were participants' coping strategies that mediated between the comforting ritual character of news practices and the disruptiveness of (negative) news content, such as expertly slaloming around disturbing news or "dampening the shock" by simultaneously watching reruns of familiar TV shows. Whereas research has looked into motivations for news use (most notably through uses and gratifications research) and news avoidance (e.g., Toff and Nielsen, 2018; Zerba, 2011), the domain in between, where people – apparently rather meticulously – measure and negotiate their exposure to and engagement with news, has received less attention (for exception, see Couldry & Markham, 2008).

Epistemologically, people's lack of awareness about their news use raises concerns over knowledge generated through methods that rely on people's own recollection (surveys, interviews, diaries, etc.). Less worried about social desirability – our participants seemed to have little problem watching cat videos or swiping straight to entertainment news – we were surprised by the irregularities between people's perception of their news practices from just minutes earlier and what the recordings showed. While well-known that people have limited ability to accurately estimate their own news behavior, our participants sometimes wrongly recalled even basic elements of their news use, such as how much of and even which articles they had read. This makes grasping the phenomenological experience of using news even *more* important: only then can people's (systematic) blind spots regarding their own news use be taken into account. Finally, in order to understand and measure how users' handling and navigation of devices and platforms impacts their cognition and sense-making of news, rather than approximating a natural setting, more in-situ research is needed: people should be studied using the devices and platforms they *actually* use, *when* and *where* they actually use them.

CHAPTER 7

A user perspective on Time Spent: Temporal experiences of everyday news use

Groot Kormelink, T & Costera Meijer, I (2019)
"A user perspective on Time Spent: Temporal experiences of everyday news use."
Journalism Studies, Online First: 1-16.

"Four out of ten Dutch people barely read or watch news." This rather alarmist headline was published by Dutch newspapers (Obbink, 2017; Parool.nl, 2017) after *The Netherlands Institute for Social Research* released their 2017 report "Dutch people and news." The headline was likely based on the following excerpt from the report's press release:

> More than half of the population (61%) on an average day* uses at least one news medium and spends at least five consecutive minutes on using news media. (SCP.nl, 2017)

In the research report, its authors provided more nuance: when also including news use with a duration of *less* than five consecutive minutes, the percentage of Dutch people who do not consume news every day dropped from 39 to 21 (and on a weekly basis even to 5) (Wennekers & de Haan, 2017: 8).

First and foremost an example of how nuance tends to get lost when research turns into news, this anecdote is also illustrative of three related tendencies in journalism and its study. The first tendency is to measure news consumption in terms of how much time people spend on it. Especially since the development of audience analytics it has become common practice to use 'time spent' (and adjacent metrics) to measure the consumption of news items, platforms or brands, both in the newsroom (e.g., Cherubini & Nielsen, 2016; Cohen, 2018) and within journalism studies (Molyneux, 2018; Nelson & Lei, 2018; Thurman, 2018; Thurman & Fletcher, 2019). As any researcher will quickly point out, time spent – like any metric – is not a neutral measure of news consumption; one's choice of metric always impacts the results. This is illustrated by Swedish research comparing news use measured through both page views (clicks) and time spent: in page views, "public sphere" news accounted for 9%, whereas measured in time spent, it accounted for 20% (von Krogh & Andersson, 2016). Likewise, studying online news audiences, Nelson & Webster (2016) found no correlation between size (unique visitors) and engagement (time spent). Still, time spent has been recognized as a viable metric for audience attention because it allows for comparisons across platforms (Thurman, 2018). Since time spent is likely to become a more dominant measure of news consumption, it is worthwhile to further explore what exactly it does and does not measure.

The second tendency is to use 'time spent' to make inferences about news users, especially their interests or preferences. Keeping with the Swedish example, it is easy to see how the page view numbers may be used to support claims about the public's appetite for 'junk news', whereas the time spent results may serve as evidence of their interest in public affairs news. Potentially problematic about basing audience understanding (solely) on metrics is that these are not intended to capture the interests or experiences of news users, but rather are a measure designed by the news industry,

ultimately to quantify and sell users' attention to advertisers (Ang, 1991; Napoli, 2011; Webster, 2014). What follows is that "problems" and "solutions" regarding news use also tend to be framed in ways beneficial to this industry (cf. Keightley & Downey, 2018). For example, in the "attention economy" (Davenport & Beck, 2001) which sees news media competing for the finite resource that is the audience's attention, measuring news use in terms of time spent quickly leads to the question of how the time people spend on news can be increased. An alternative starting point is the perspective of the news users, which instead raises such questions as how and why people engage in short news practices like "checking" and "scanning" (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015), and how they might better be served both informationally and experientially.

The third tendency is to see more time spent on news use as inherently or automatically desirable. What the above-mentioned exclusion of short news sessions implies is that practices like "checking" or "scanning") are less legitimate or desirable forms of news use. This is understandably the case for news organizations, for whom more attention minutes equal more revenue or better public service. From a societal standpoint, following the notion of an informed citizenry, it is also generally taken for granted that users spending more time on news is beneficial. However, while it may seem reasonable to qualify people who indicate spending "no time at all" on (traditional) news as "disconnected citizens" (Blekesaune et al. 2012), it is quite another question whether *more* time spent on news necessarily translates into being *more* engaged; i.e., whether the relationship between spending time on news and being an engaged citizen is linear. A related question is whether there is a threshold in terms of time news use that must be crossed in order to count as legitimate news use.

The aim of this paper is to add to and deepen existing research on time spent and news consumption by exploring what spending time on news means from an explicit user perspective. It does so by drawing upon three recent qualitative user studies that center around the notion of experience (chapter 4-6).

Literature: Time and news use

Central as time is to journalism, it has received limited explicit attention in journalism studies (Bødker & Sonnevend, 2018; Zelizer, 2018). The same is true for research on news use: although time is featured frequently, it is rarely problematized. Time is typically approached in roughly one of three ways. In the first approach, time serves as the *unit of analysis*. The constructs used most often for measuring news consumption are frequency and duration (time spent). Frequency refers to the times per day, week or month news is used, and is typically measured through surveys (e.g., Molyneux, 2018; Strömbäck et al. 2013). Duration as expressed in minutes spent on news use is typically

measured via tools like Google Analytics (von Krogh & Andersson, 2016) and comScore (Nelson & Lei, 2018), surveys (Aalberg et al., 2013; Blekesaune et al., 2012; Molyneux, 2018) or a combination thereof (Thurman, 2018; Thurman & Fletcher, 2019). A benefit of minutely measuring time spent is that it allows for detailed and precise comparisons between different news media, platforms, brand or genres. This has led to valuable insights, such as Nelson & Lei's (2018) finding that mobile app users spend significantly more time on news than those who use a mobile browser, and Thurman & Fletcher's (2019) finding that the impact of the digital distribution of news on how much time people spend on news differs per age group and per newspaper brand.

In the second approach, time is seen in terms of the *temporal organization* of news use, often in relation to spatial and social dimensions (Peters, 2016; Silverstone, 1994). Methods include diaries (e.g. Courtois et al., 2013; Dimmick et al., 2011; Hoplamazian et al., 2018) and/or (digital) logs (van Damme et al., 2015). The focus here is typically on how news use is dispersed throughout people's day or week and/or how it is embedded within other activities. For instance, Dimmick et al. (2011) found that mobile news occupies a new spatiotemporal niche they call "interstices", defined as "the gaps in the *routines* of media users *between scheduled* activities (23, emphasis added).

In the third approach, the focus is on the *temporal characteristics of the news* itself, most commonly in terms of speed. Subsequently, these characteristics are used either for inferring about news use or as input for research into news use. In the first variant, people's experience or engagement with news is read off news production logics; Keightley & Downey (2018) summarize that it is often assumed that "speedily produced news content and fast, flexible technologies of delivery will necessarily produce temporal experiences which are characterised predominantly by speed and, in many cases, that this will routinely produce superficial engagement with the news, or alienation from it altogether" (105). Spending less time with news is thus equated with staying on the surface and being less interested (or even disinterested) in news. Vice versa, Slow Journalism (a critical response to the negative effects associated with speed in journalism practice) is linked to such notions as "responsible citizenship" (Le Masurier, 2015: 149). In the second variant, the temporal –characteristics of the news are used as input for research on news use. For instance, based on features distilled from academic literature, Drok & Hermans (2016) surveyed users' interest in Slow Journalism using such items as preferences for in-depth reporting and explanation. Similar examples include research surveying news users' preferences for characteristics of online news (production), such as continuous updates (Bergström, 2008) and immediacy of reporting (Van der Wurff & Schoenbach, 2014).

Recently, two articles on news use have engaged critically with the notion of time itself. Peters & Schrøder (2018) argue that research has tended to focus on the "here and

now" and make the case for a process-based approach to studying news repertories that focuses on "the emergence, maintenance, and (re)formation of audiences' news repertories in everyday life and across the lifespan" (1079). Keightley & Downey (2018) instead have explored how people themselves experience and navigate the temporal logics surrounding their news use. This aligns with Zelizer's (2018) critique of how time is typically seen as a "blank slate", taking "shape more *in response to* complex settings than as a result of other kinds of interactions" (113). Using Keightley's (2013)" notion of "zones of intermediacy", they focus on "the experiential arenas in which temporal meaning is produced at the juncture of times – embodied, social, cultural historical and technological" (Keightley & Downey, 2018: 100). This concept draws attention to 1) how temporal experiences are produced where several temporalities meet (e.g. clock time, work time), 2) how the temporalities of news texts and technologies impact and set the parameters for users' experiences, 3) but also how users have agency in navigating and negotiating these times (Keightley & Downey, 2018). For instance, the practice of "checking" involves more than a superficial glance at the latest headline: it takes place in a distinct (spatio) temporal context, such as checking one's phone in the morning to postpone having to get up and get ready for work, or filling up the time between two appointments; it is shaped by how the news is presented to the user (e.g. ordered chronologically and/or ranked by importance) and how the device or platforms is to be operated; and – as this article will show – it is shaped by people's tactics for using the news.

Methodology: a case for experience

As noted, most studies of news use conceptualize time as a given. In this paper, we instead focus on time as part of people's *experience*: what spending time on news means from a user perspective. Experience is a fruitful point of departure for four reasons. First, it refers to undergoing or having undergone something (Tuan, 1977), and as such helps one move beyond opinions (Costera Meijer, 2013) that are not grounded in people's actual, everyday encounters with news. For instance, for our research purposes it is less helpful to establish whether news users have a particular opinion about time – e.g. that 'accuracy' is more important than 'immediacy' – than to establish and understand how they actually go about checking the latest news. Second, focusing on the 'undergoing' of an experience enables one to capture how the passing of time is integral to people's news use.

Third, experience is a broad concept that opens up the possibility of a wide variety of dimensions related to news use to be included, from cognitive to affective, from communicative to aesthetic, from material to spatiotemporal (Gentikow, 2009, in Ytre-Arne, 2011; see also Costera Meijer, 2016). Following the notion of "zones of

intermediacy" (Keightley, 2013), in order to understand what spending time on news means from a user perspective, we must take a broader view that captures how different temporalities overlap and give meaning to an experience.

Fourth, taking experience as point of departure allows for "temporal reflexivity" (Carlson & Lewis, 2018) regarding one's methods and their epistemological consequences. Experience can be described as "a cover-all term for the various modes through which a person knows and constructs a reality" (Tuan, 1977: 8). These modes include sensation, perception and conception (Oakeshott in Tuan, 1977: 8).[3] Following Throop's (2003) call for using methods that "differentially access both prereflective and reflective varieties of experience […] [and thus] ensuring that experience is explored ethnographically throughout the entire range of its various articulations" (Throop, 2003: 235), we draw from three recent qualitative studies that each center on a different 'mode of knowing'. The dominant qualitative method – interviewing – typically depends upon what might be called conception: "those explicit reflective processes that tend to give coherence and definite form to experience" (Throop, 2003: 235). In order to include a wide array of dimensions related to how people experience spending time on news, we used a different 'temporal orientation' in each of our methods. In study #1, participants reflected on an *immediately prior* news experience (conception). In study #2 participants verbally reported their news experience *in real time* while using news (perception). Finally, in study #3, participants were filmed *while* using news and *afterward* watched and reflected on these videos, with the aim of capturing sensory and embodied dimensions of their news use (sensation). Table 1 provides further details of each study. The aim, thus, was to use different temporal orientations in order to shine light on different dimensions of what it means to spend time using news.

3 Whether these modes of knowing are empirically separable is beyond the scope of this paper; we use them for their heuristic value.

Table 1.

Study	Method and procedure	Temporal orientation	Dominant mode of knowing
#1 What viewers of current affairs experience as captivating political information *(chapter 5)*	Viewing and discussing clips: we watched items from current affairs TV shows and immediately afterward interviewed each participant about the extent to which they felt captivated by each item. (N=54)	Reflective	Conception
#2 What clicks actually mean *(chapter 4)*	Think-aloud protocol: participants browsed digital news as they normally would and said out loud all the steps they made and thoughts they had. (N=56)	Real-time	Perception
#3 Video-ethnography of people's everyday news use in the home *(chapter 6)*	Video-ethnography: participants were filmed from two sides while using news in their own home, on their own devices; immediately afterward the videos were watched and made sense of with each participant. (N=13)	Real-time; reflective	Sensation

Results

By exploring what spending time means from a user perspective, we generated three main findings that add to our understanding of time (spent) as measure of news consumption, in particular as it relates to people's interest in, attention to or engagement with news. First, time spent does not reflect the quality of attention. Second, time spent is not necessarily linearly related to interest, attention, or engagement. Third, all time spent is not equal, as different news media and platforms coincide with different temporal experiences.

Finding #1: "Time spent" does not reflect quality of attention

Our first finding is that time spent does not reflect how that time is spent: the quality of attention. In particular, time spent – measured in minutes or seconds on a page – does not (always) take into account whether users are actively engaging with content (Cherubini and Nielsen 2016). While perhaps not surprising, our data provide more insight into why this is the case.

First, participants regularly opened news items in new tabs without reading them (yet). When visiting news websites on his laptop, Kevin used the following tactic: first, he scanned the headlines on the homepage and pre-selected potentially interesting articles by using ctrl + left mouse click to open each article in a new, separate tab. Then, when finished with this pre-selection, he went through the opened tabs one by one, closing each after having read them. This means that each article was open for a considerable time without having been paid any attention to; indeed, the articles that caught his eye first were open the shortest amount of time. A more extreme example, Myra had a large number of tabs open in her browser, some of which for days and some of which they did not expect to end up reading at all. They explained:

> Yes, also very often it's things I don't read. Then I think, 'oh I'll read that later' [. . .] and then there's like 15 things open and then sometimes I don't read them at all, and they're open for like two weeks.

In the latter case, then, articles collecting more 'time spent' actually points to Myra's *not* being very interested in reading them.

This complication can partially be overcome by looking at *engaged time*: a more sophisticated metric that measures the time users *actively* spend engaging with an item, for instance by registering scrolling activity (Cherubini & Nielsen, 2016). However, even this metric is not faultless. Filming Melanie, we observed that as she was visiting a news site, she was simultaneously watching a series on her television. Her gaze constantly shifted between the article she was reading and the TV series. Yet, because she was nonetheless repeatedly 'moving' through the article by constantly having her finger on her mouse, even the 'engaged time' metric would not have picked up her shifting attention. Here too, her longer 'engaged time' was actually the result of her *limited* engagement with and attention to the news.

Time spent thus does not capture the quality of users' attention to news. We also found this in study #1, where we interviewed viewers about their experiences watching items from two different current affairs TV shows. We found a marked difference in how the two shows were watched. One show was appointment television: participants

watched it intently in a concentrated, lean-forward fashion, because they wanted to learn about politics. The other show was watched in a lean-back fashion: participants often had it play in the background while doing other activities, paying attention with one ear. Carmen illustrates: "It's on in the background, but then I'm also cooking and [unpacking] the groceries, so doing all kinds of things at home, and then if it's really interesting I will watch a bit." The amount of time spent viewing these shows does not capture the varying levels of attention and interest involved.

It is also worth noting that spending time on news is not a stamp of approval from users. Previous research showed that people consume news that they do not see as quality news (Costera Meijer, 2007), news that does not lead to a satisfying viewing experience (Stanca et al., 2013), and news that they do not trust (Tsfati & Cappella, 2003). Similarly, our participants had no problem admitting that their attention to news did not correspond with their judgement of quality. For instance, Walter (27) criticized the journalistic quality of one news item but watched attentively because it was entertaining: "I think at least television-wise it's well done, and as a result I paid attention." In study #2, which explored why users (do not) click on news, we also found that spending time with news did not necessarily mean participants appreciated it. This was especially the case with 'clickbaity' headlines:

> Joe (26): "Then I click it if it's a very sensational headline, so I'm more like 'oh what the hell' […] sometimes there are headlines that make you go like 'what is this ridiculousness' or 'what the hell is that supposed to mean', and then I'm sometimes inclined to click".
>
> Jack (56): "'Metal band wants money for music use during torture Guantanamo', then I'm like, god what an item (clicks) then I click it and I think, what kind of band is that, what's the story behind it"
> Danny (25): "Pretty often Nu.nl has these stupid news items about, I don't know, a new year's day dive. Couldn't care less, but if it happens to have a picture of a lady, I do click on it".

From a user's perspective, spending time with news is no quality endorsement.

Finding #2: Less time spent can point to not less but more interest or engagement

Above we showed that time spent is not an unflawed measure of interest or engagement because it does not capture *how* that time is spent. A perhaps more surprising insight is that shorter news sessions can indicate not the *lack* but the *presence* of interest or engagement. In the methodology section, we listed four reasons for taking experience

as point of departure, one of which was that experience suggests actually *undergoing* something. Study #3 revealed the relevance of an additional meaning of experience: "the ability to learn from what one has undergone" (Tuan, 1977: 9). We found three ways in which what might call people's 'being experienced' with news was the reason their news use was so quick or short.

First, 'experienced' news users have *embodied knowledge* of how to most efficiently use their devices (see also chapter 6). Their tactics included quickly swiping downward to refresh and update a news app to see the very latest headlines, rearranging the icons on their smartphone so that their favorite apps are within thumb's reach, and scrolling with a specific finger so they can scroll faster. Consider the extreme detail (and proficiency) in Regina's explanation of why she uses different fingers for different actions on Twitter:

> For scrolling et cetera I just use my thumb on Twitter. [. . .] Sometimes when I'm ALL the way down and I have to go all the way up uhm then it's faster to scroll with my forefinger because [. . .] with my right hand I hold [my phone] so [. . .] with my forefinger I have access to the entire screen so that [. . .] I can make the movement of scrolling to the top bigger, because my reach is larger than with my thumb, because my thumb is not large enough to get all the way to the top of the screen.

More directly related to *time spent*, when coming across a potentially interesting long read while using Facebook on his smartphone, Ferdinand very quickly – within ten seconds – decided whether or not to save the article by using the save-for-later app Pocket installed on his phone. He clicked on the article, scrolled through it very quickly to pick up words indicating the essence of the article ("When I saw this [section] 'what to do' [it] told me [...] that there was more depth to the news"), clicked on "copy link", opened his Pocket-app, and tapped "add" on the latter's pop-up suggestion "Add copied URL to your list?". Although – so he claims – he would read the full article in Pocket later, the 'engaged time' metric would register a mere ten seconds spent in the original article. For these experienced users, then, the very quickness of their news use attests to their skills and resourcefulness rather than their disengagement: their sessions were short because they are efficient and proficient in navigating and handling their apps and devices.

Second, more experienced and especially avid news users had 'quick' news sessions not because they were disinterested or disengaged, but because they were very *efficient* at scanning the environment and picking out news relevant information. For instance, Robert quickly went through several news app successively. Within each app, he scanned all the headlines added since his last "checking cycle" (Costera Meijer

& Groot Kormelink, 2015) earlier that day, and picked out several articles he wanted to read. Within these articles, he was also focused on scanning for new information. He explained:

> If I read things in an item I already know, I tend to skip past it, so I don't read everything in the item because often it contains things that are a repetition of something I had already read elsewhere or [that I] already know.

Such scanning might best be typified as a *burst* of news use: a short, intense session characterized by highly efficient information scanning (cf. Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2018). Here, too, the short time spent points to intense engagement with news rather than superficial engagement or disengagement.

Finally, some participants relied on what we might call their meta-knowledge of news: they are aware of general conventions or title-specific tendencies of the news and adjust their news use accordingly. For instance, Regina referenced the inverted pyramid ("that pyramid model: first the very most important news and then it becomes this little funnel") when explaining why she repeatedly skipped the last paragraphs of news items. Consider also Fiona, who in her e-paper often first reads the lead and the conclusion, and only *then* decides whether it is worth reading the rest of the article. This way she does not waste her time reading what she described as "exaggerated" articles. As she explains:

> [. . .] I often do that, the beginning and the end, sometimes [. . .] you read the headline and the conclusion [and that] is enough. Then it's an enormously suggestive article and then in the end it concludes: it's all not so bad.

She illustrated this when encountering an article about a high ranking leader of the Taliban being killed. Reading the piece in its entirety would have been waste of time:

> That bearded dude on the right has been killed, but then I read the beginning [points to the first paragraphs] and then in the end it concludes: his successor is already standing by, then I'm like well (laughs) That's how it goes (laughs) Then I'm like yeah, this one is has been wiped out and the next one is ready, problem is not solved.

Again, here Fiona's and Regina's limited reading time per article points not to their disinterest or disengagement but to their savviness and experience as news users.

Finding #3: All time spent is not equal

Whereas the first two findings concerned the question of what the metric 'time spent' does and does not measure, the third finding relates to the comparability of news use based on time. To be sure, since attention is a finite resource that people can only spend once, time is a most useful measure for studying how people allocate their overall attention between different activities, devices or platforms. However, what it *means* to spend more time on one medium versus another is a more complicated matter. Indeed, our results suggest that in terms of users' experience, it is difficult to make meaningful comparisons between different forms of news use based on time.

First, while a very rudimentary division, digital news use seems to call up different expectations of time than traditional news use (print newspapers, TV), not necessarily in terms of the immediacy of content, but regarding the speed or — to be more precise – the efficiency of the user practice itself. Participants expected quick, smooth user experiences and were frustrated when these were interrupted. This is illustrated by Kevin, who reflecting on a *past* experience recounted a deep, bodily-felt frustration concerning an error on the Dutch news site NOS.nl:

> Can I leave a complaint with you about the NOS website? Those videos don't load properly anymore, you have to, VERY annoyingly, you have to reload them and then it gives you an error message, reload and only then it works. […] That's really fucking annoying. […] No, but it's really been annoying me. Because often it's clips of like 30 seconds and then I'm like "oh nooo" [throws up hands and rocks back and forth, conveying a physical expression of frustration] […] then on one page they have three clips and then you keep having to reload and click again and reload and wehhh. […] I've noticed I'm watching less because of that, then with the third clip I'm like never mind […] so it does have a negative impact on my news consumption.

While in objective time reloading a page may only takes a few seconds, it apparently felt like a major interruption of his browsing experience. Mangen (2008: 412) describes the impatience users experience when using digital media as "an experiential situation bereft of both physical and phenomenological presence". When a digital medium freezes or falters, the technology is brought to the fore and is experienced as an obstruction or intrusion (Mangen, 2018; see also Ihde, 1990). Although a print newspaper, too, can break down and reveal itself as a technology – e.g., when a drop of coffee falls from our mug onto the paper, making the text suddenly unreadable – digital media experiences are more easily interrupted. Participants' expectations of smoothness were also apparent in study #2, where some did not want to click on videos because they did not want to sit through a commercial, which was seen as an interruption of the flow of their news use.

Compared to traditional news use (especially the print newspaper), during digital news use the experience of time seems to become intensified.

Second, different devices and platforms co-produce different temporal experiences. A prime example here is a distinct user practice on Facebook we called "scrolling", characterized by an urge to keep the movement of scrolling going, regardless of one's interest in the content (see chapter 6). This is illustrated by Ferdinand, who watched a news video on Facebook for only twenty seconds before feeling the urge to move on: "I thought [the video] was really nice but I don't wanna spend too much time doing it." Although he found it difficult to verbalize what exactly made him want to limit his time with content and keep scrolling other than feeling an urge "to keep it going", it appears that the platform – including the way it is navigated and physically handled with one move (a mouse scroll or a thumb scroll) – invites a sense of restlessness that encourages light, quick engagement with content. Rushkoff (2013) has described this as a "perpetual now", in which we ignore what is before us and "compulsively anticipate the next decision point" (116). As Ash (2015) clarifies, this is not to be confused with Csikszentmihalyi's (1990) notion of "flow" which refers to the positive state of being in the zone, absorbed in the activity at hand. Indeed, participants expressed no joy regarding their urge to keep scrolling.

A specific affordance of the video-ethnography (study #3) was that it captured – without interruption – the impact of the *passing of time* on news use. The videos showed that as time went by, some participants grew satiated with news, in the sense that they felt they could not absorb any more information. This was especially the case with participants using media that did not let them (as readily) decide *themselves* in which order to consume news items. On news websites and apps, participants selected and read the items they deemed most interesting first and stopped when they had read everything they wanted to read. On the contrary, on devices and platforms where users tended to follow the order suggested by the creator (e.g., newspaper or e-paper) or could not at all choose the order of news items (e.g., Facebook), satiation impacted their selection behavior and reading style (e.g. reading versus scanning) more pronouncedly. For instance, after having read her newspaper (chronologically) for a while, Norah leafed through her newspaper faster and faster and only glanced at headlines. She even skipped articles that she found very interesting, such as an article regarding dark matter:

> I watched the [documentary] series Cosmos [A Spacetime Odyssey], ***I find that SUPER interesting*** how all of that works, astronomy and physics. ***I'd actually want to read that***, but now I'm thinking '***pff, it doesn't fit [into my head] anymore***.' […] Because then I have to think about dark matter which is already a VERY complicated concept

> which no one can actually explain what it is, and then I have to read about that now [. . .] ***pff, I can't anymore*** (sighs).

She did not read an article she found "super interesting" because gradually she had become satiated: she felt she could not absorb any more information. Similarly, while viewing the recording of his own Facebook scrolling session, Ferdinand noted:

> "Yeah 'cause then I got tired of checking. Yeah this, ah yeah, the Time article was about uh uh...
>
> Interviewer: [tries to read the headline as captured on video] "6 things"
>
> "Yeah how to get things done. And I thought it could be nice to click on it just yeah for inspiration, but then I was already tired of clicking so [I] just kept scrolling."

Like Norah, Ferdinand came across an article that interested him, but due to having become "tired" of clicking, he did not select it. This suggests that when studying people's selection or time-spending behavior, the 'reading order' suggested or enabled by the platform and device must be taken into account, in particular when inferring people's interests or preferences. For news media with a more or less 'predetermined' reading order, the passing of time has greater impact: during the beginning of a user's news session, their selection or time-spending behavior might be more indicative of their (lack of) interest than toward the end of that session. That is, news people come across later – regardless of how interesting they find it – is more prone to being skipped due to them having become satiated.

Even when comparing use of the same news medium, time spent is not always revealing. An illustration is the difference between *allocating* one's time *for* news and *restricting* one's time *with* news. Fiona earmarks her Saturday morning for her newspaper. She sees this as a treat, a moment to relax on her day off. Norah, on the other hand, limits her time with her Saturday paper, actively taking time into consideration when reading individual articles:

> And maybe half way [the article] I'll think, yeah now I get it, let me go on, because I still have a whole newspaper and I don't plan on spending two hours on the newspaper, because I have things to do.

Norah's not wanting to spend too much time on the newspaper is an example of her navigating and negotiating different temporalities, including news delivery time

(Saturday morning), leisure time (since it is weekend she does not want to spend too much time on "troublesome" things like news) and chore time (having "things to do" like groceries). The actual time she spends is insufficient to make sense of this practice: in this "zone of intermediacy" (Keightley, 2013) it is the juncture of these different temporalities that gives her experience its particular meaning.

Conclusion

Aiming to explore what spending time means from a user perspective, this article added three nuances regarding 'time spent' as a measure of news consumption. Overall, our results suggest that time spent does not necessarily measure interest in, attention to or engagement with news. First, time spent does not reflect the quality of attention being paid. Second, there is no linear relationship between time spent and interest or engagement. More time spent on news use can be the result of little interest or engagement, and less time spent can be an indicator of more interest or engagement. The more 'experienced' news users tended to engage in quicker news practices exactly because they were 'practiced' and skillful at using news: they knew how to handle and navigate their devices, they could efficiently scan digital environments for new and relevant information, and they were aware of news conventions or title-specific tendencies telling them which parts of news articles they could skip. Therefore, discounting news use of less than five minutes does not do justice to the intensity and efficiency of the "bursts of news use" we found; these point not to disengaged citizens but to experienced, skillful, inquisitive news users.

Third, different news devices, platforms and genres coincide with different temporal experiences. Time is experienced differently depending on several factors, one of them being the type of device or platform used. Television and radio are often used in a lean-back mode (Lull, 1990; Larsen, 2000) and reading the newspaper is often experienced as a moment of relaxation, a ritual treat (e.g., Berelson 1949). With digital news media, on the other hand, speed and efficiency appear to be valued more – or perhaps more precisely, the lack thereof is disliked – making the experience of time become intensified. Although time spent is certainly useful to measure how people divide the finite resource that is their attention, our results suggest that we must be mindful of what we can infer from differences between platforms in terms of time spent. What do these findings mean in light of the decline in time people spend on digital news as compared to print news (Thurman 2018; Thurman and Fletcher 2019)? Our studies are ill-equipped to speculate about the democratic implications – such as learning from news on different platforms (Kruikemeier, Lecheler, & Boyer 2018) – and economic implications of the transition to digital news. However, it is worth emphasizing that

while the digitalization of journalism has certainly broadened people's arsenal of news user practices (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015), enabling quicker, more efficient news use, there is also a sense of restlessness and compulsiveness to such digital news practices as scrolling. We therefore propose further research on the affective qualities of these newer forms of news use (Ytre-Arne & Moe, 2018).

Our results suggest that when measuring time spent on individual (digital) articles, differences between devices and platforms should also be taken into account. Whereas on news apps users typically select and read articles in succession, on news websites users can open several articles simultaneously. This first of all makes it especially urgent to use 'engaged time' rather than 'time spent' on news websites. What is more, on platforms where users have less (e-paper, paper) or no (perceived) freedom (Facebook, Twitter) to choose their own order of reading, it is important to take into account that readers can grow tired or satiated as their news session progresses. What this implies is that for these platforms, 'time spent' becomes a less reliable measure of interest the 'further' users are; toward the end of their session they will be more inclined to skip content they do find interesting.

Our results also suggest that a newsroom strategy of retaining users' attention as long as possible may make sense from an attention economy perspective, but does not necessarily match with the experience of (digital) news use which is often – although certainly not always – characterized by smoothness and efficiency. One alternative strategy is to provide news in such a way that it simultaneously affords different user practices, from "scanning" to "reading" (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015). For instance, by summarizing a news article in a couple of succinct bullet points, "scanners" are enabled to quickly get the gist of the story, while not stopping the "readers" from consuming the full story (indeed, it could be argued that such a schema can also help readers to better understand the core of the article). This strategy maximizes not the time that people spent on the story but the number of people that can get value out of it.

A different challenge is how to get news users to take their time to consume content they are already interested in. What the logic of "scrolling" (i.e. 'keeping it moving' even if one likes the content) suggests is that users find it (increasingly?) challenging to 'commit' to one news item when there is a plethora of other content to consume. One strategy could be to provide content that is experienced as valuable (Costera Meijer, 2019). The small sample from our video-ethnography tentatively indicates that news users are more willing to invest their time in news that generates insights. For instance, articles that made participants curious about specific but insignificant details were clicked and scanned until the answer was found ("I'm just gonna check which supermarket it was [that was robbed]"), whereas articles that were experienced as more

constructive or insightful ("it gave me new insights [and] a broader and richer picture of the issue") tended to be read more fully. This finding is corroborated by our current affairs TV study (study #1) that showed that users were willing to invest their time and attention in exchange for insight into complex political matters. Finally, following the example of the app Pocket, another strategy is to make it easier to save and access articles for later consumption, so that interesting content the user comes across but cannot consume at that moment can be efficiently accessed during a more opportune moment.

It should be emphasized that our findings are based on qualitative research and that quantitative research is needed to establish how dominant the patterns we found are. E.g., we cannot say how prevalent such practices as efficient information scanning or having multiple tabs with news open at once are. Indeed, our aim was to add to our understanding of 'time spent' by exploring spending time on news from a user perspective.

CHAPTER 8

Conclusions

Introduction and recap

This dissertation set out to answer how people's experiences of news use could be captured, and how these experiences could help make sense of everyday news use. In the introduction, it was observed that although news users have taken center stage in journalism and its study, they have not gained a seat at the table. Emic approaches to news use have been overshadowed due to three tendencies within journalism studies. First, much research focuses on news professionals' assumptions about and conceptions of audiences instead of on audiences themselves. Second, especially in a fast-changing media landscape, research is dominated by approaches that measure and quantify rather than seek to understand (changing) news use from users' own vantage point. Third, increasingly, data are collected by and in and on the news industry's terms, which is framed as more "data-driven" and (thus) "scientific" (see Napoli, 2011), risking replacement of efforts to understand news users from their own perspective.

A second point of departure was scholars' conception of audiences in terms of agency and/or activity. Though valuable for grasping changing news use in a changing media landscape, three concerns were raised over what the notion of more or less active users is prone to overlook. First, a focus on what people do or do not do – what was called the on/off approach – risks essentializing news users based on a singular (e.g. page views as measure of users' preferences or interests) or limited (e.g. the types of media they use) dimension of their news use. Second, the notion of active users as deliberate and rational is not easily compatible with researching – respectively – automatic or subconscious dimensions of people's news use and how it is shaped by (everyday) structures. Third, relatedly, the notion of active agents tends to lead to a focus on cognitive dimensions of news use (selection, meaning-making, production) at the cost of other experiential dimensions, such as affective and sensory ones. This dissertation therefore implemented three shifts:

1 From assumptions about news users to understanding news users in and on their own terms;
2 From categorizing and quantifying what news users do to understanding what it *feels* like to (not) use news;
3 From a focus on cognition to including other (experiential) dimensions of news use.

These shifts, it was argued, could potentially reveal a different, more nuanced picture of everyday news use. To effectuate these changes, the case was made for taking the notion of experience as point of departure. Experience was a fruitful starting point because it affords: 1) moving beyond opinions; 2) grounding people's reporting of their news use in what they have actually undergone or are undergoing; 3) taking a broad lens that leaves open the possibility for various (not a priori considered) dimensions

to be noticed and (therefore) included; and 4) an opportunity to critically explore the methodological and epistemological consequences of using qualitative interview-based approaches. Below follows a reflection on what this approach has added to our understanding of everyday news use.

Theoretical contributions

Rather than aiming to arrive at a unified audience theory, this dissertation sought to do justice to the messiness and contradictions of everyday news use in all its complexity. Capturing the experience of everyday news required a carefully designed methodological set-up. As chapter 2 showed, the methodologies used in this dissertation each centered around a different dimension of experience (*erleben*, *erlebnis*), mode of knowing (sensation, perception, conception), and temporal organizational (real-time, retrospective). As such, the methodologies each made it possible to capture different aspects of people's news use, from cognitive and affective to sensory, pragmatic, lifestyle, and communicative (Gentile et al. 2007; Gentikow, in Ytre-Arne, 2011). Following the idea of "crystallization" (Ellingson, 2008), the insights gained into everyday news use were complementary but also necessarily partial (Tracy, 2010). Together, they helped generate a more complex, layered understanding of everyday news use, adding color and depth to existing 'portraits' of news use as well as redrawing some of their lines.

First, this dissertation has nuanced dominant assumptions about the interests of news users. Taken at face value, metrics such as clicks and time spent appear to confirm long-held suspicions about users' preferences for news, as clicking patterns suggest that users are mostly interested soft or sensational news (e.g., Boczkowski & Mitchelstein, 2013; Tenenboim & Cohen, 2015; Tewksbury, 2003). By taking people's *experience* of using news as point of departure – or more precisely, by capturing their experience while using news – this dissertation has shown that their interests are not fully reflected by metrics. Chapter 4 has shown that although clicks do indicate some type of interest in news, they are a problematic measure of people's interest because they overemphasize headlines that 'demand' a click (i.e. that *evoke* curiosity more than reflect a pre-existing interest) and miss browsing practices such as "checking" and "monitoring" (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015) that do not require a click but that users do experience as valuable and informative. Similarly, chapter 7 has shown while time spent can be an indicator of interest or engagement, it can also point to a lack thereof or be a sign of users' skills and practice. Finally, journalists' assumptions about users' hunger for junk news and their subsequent concerns about personalization were nuanced in chapter 3, which showed that news users, too, worry about potentially missing important updates if they personalized their news diet. It is important to emphasize that these findings

do not suggest that news users do not enjoy consuming 'junk news' nor that they will consume public affairs news in large quantities; rather, they suggest that users' clicking and time-spending behavior – at an individual or aggregate level – does not reflect the breadth of their interests.

Second, this dissertation nuances the narrative of "the rationalization of audience understanding" (Napoli, 2011) which suggests that more data necessarily get one closer to a better or more 'objective' understanding of news audiences. While metrics (and tracking data) have certainly added an indispensable – and previously unattainable – perspective to understanding news audiences, this dissertation has shown that such data cannot be interpreted in isolation. For instance, clicks and time spent cannot be made sense of without context, such as the devices and platforms used and the surrounding user practices like browsing and scrolling. Capturing people's experiences of news use allows for a critical assessment of the strengths and limitations of metrics, and helps avoid essentializing news users based on an isolated dimension of their news use.

Third, this dissertation captured experiences and associated practices that do not neatly fit within established categories, generating nuances and new insights that further our understanding of everyday news use. A first example is what we might call "measured avoidance", which fits somewhere between the categories of news-seeking and news avoidance. It refers to people's careful measuring of and slaloming around (negative) content to protect their frame of mind. It is worth recounting the informant that 'felt' her way through Facebook, her finger ready to scroll away if news hit her emotionally; or the informant that skipped heavy content in her newspaper after the first pages to preserve her weekend mood. This notion of measured avoidance also adds to mood management theory (Zillmann, 1988), showing that the optimization of one's mood through content choices occurs at the most micro of levels – down to the scanning of words in a news item to establish its tone or valence – and is actively negotiated *throughout* one's news practice.

A second example is the distinction between enjoyment and appreciation for making sense of how people value political (TV) news. These notions from media psychology proved not only measurable in experiments (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014; Oliver & Bartsch, 2010), but were also found inductively to be distinct experiences embedded in distinct practices: enjoyment is characterized by pleasure in the sense of fun and amusement and is associated with a lean-back viewing practice in which the news often functions as "background noise" or "companionship" (Lull, 1990), whereas appreciation is associated with concentrated, lean-forward viewing and is characterized by a willingness to invest time in exchange for gaining insight and learning new perspectives. What this distinction could suggest is that people's inclination to select entertaining news over public affairs news is less a reflection of people's intrinsic interest in news

than a reflection of how the former provides instant gratification whereas the latter requires an investment of time and energy before it generates pleasure (in the sense of enlightenment). A last example of nuances generated by explicitly starting from users' experiences are the thirty considerations for clicking or not clicking on news (chapter 4). These were generated bottom-up, adding further detail to known phenomena (e.g. the difference between 'bemusement' and 'bullshit' as reactions to clickbait headlines) as well as yielding original considerations such as "gleeful annoyance" which is a mix of positive (delight) and negative (rage) affect.

A **fourth** conclusion is that experience is a helpful starting point for making sense of news use because it requires a more holistic approach that helps generate a deeper understanding of news use unattainable when looking at singular or separate dimensions. While one of the starting points of this dissertation was to go beyond cognitive dimensions of news use, the chapters have shown that we must not throw out the baby with the bathwater: cognitive, affective, sensory or other dimensions have significance in their *interconnectedness*. An important example in this respect is place-making: how people create a sense of home through their news use. Chapter 6 provided powerful illustrations of what we may overlook when we focus on cognition and affect as separate, pre-determined categories, such as the informant who subscribed to a newspaper to recreate a sense of nostalgia but found herself struggling with the negative content, and the informant who simultaneously snacked news websites and watched a familiar TV show to create a comfortable atmosphere in which she was then comfortable consuming news. Another illustration of how different dimensions are intricately connected in the experience of using news is the practice "scrolling", characterized by an incessant urge to keep moving down one's Facebook feed, even if one is interested in the content: it includes cognitive (perceiving the content), affective (feeling an embodied urge to move on) and sensory (moving one's finger on the mouse or keyboard) dimensions. Rather than "non-representational" theory", it would therefore perhaps be more appropriate to use the term "more-than-representational" (Lorimer, 2005) to refer to the move beyond cognitive (and symbolic) dimensions of news use.

Fifth and finally, the notion of experience proved most useful for capturing how using news involves embodied knowledge and practical skills that need to be acquired. This is a further reminder of the importance of looking beyond cognition; these skills have become so embodied that they have arguably become 'post-cognitive'. As chapter 6 has shown, learning how to efficiently handle and navigate a technology or platform requires time and effort. Such skills of news use have been underappreciated in journalism studies. Digital literacy studies have looked at a wide variety of skills users need to function in digital environments (Eshet, 2004; Hargittai, 2005) and media literacy has been defined as the ability to access, analyze and produce information (Aufderheide

& Firestone, 1993; Livingstone, 2004), the first of which leaves room for including learning how to handle and navigate devices and platforms. Yet, news literacy has focused mostly on critical thinking and comprehension of news (production) processes (Ashley, Maksl & Craft, 2013; Fleming, 2014; Mihailidis, 2012). This dissertation suggests that in addition to enabling or empowering people to function as "good" citizens, news literacy – or news fluency, as Rosenstiel & Elizabeth (2018) recently suggested – might also include teaching people how to be *proficient users*.

Social implications

An important social contribution of this dissertation is that it shows – in alignment with Costera Meijer (2013) – that listening to users does not automatically lead to a lower quality of journalism. Journalists have historically had a low estimation of people's preferences; note how in chapter 3 journalists argued users should not be allowed to personalize their news diet because that would lead to "fatties" (i.e. junk news) "with a limited or distorted world view". It is insidious that clicking patterns seemed to confirm these expectations: if people are believed to be mainly interested in junk news this can lead to click-chasing and a "dumbing down of news" (Nguyen, 2013), raising concerns about journalism's role in society (Tandoc & Thomas, 2015). What is more, it could lead to a situation where journalists and users value each other less and less. If clicking patterns 'show' that users prefer junk news, journalists may potentially come to resent them. This becomes increasingly problematic if news professionals are or feel obliged to 'listen to' or 'engage' with their audiences, as engagement has become a key term in journalism (Nelson, 2018). Vice versa, click-chasing and sensational news could (further) erode users' trust in news (Nielsen & Graves, 2017). As expressed by one of our informants, such news "is catchy, but it gets you fucking nowhere". There is a danger, then, that by 'listening' to news users as expressed in clicks, journalists end up pleasing no one (not in the least place themselves).

The results of this dissertation suggest a way out of this downward spiral: listening to users can in fact increase the quality of journalism, albeit from a user perspective, in ways not necessarily aligned with conventional journalism. As chapters 4 and 5 have shown, users certainly do consume junk news or sensational news when offered to them, but ultimately this is not what they come to serious news titles for. People do have a desire for 'public affairs' news, but not always in the way it is currently presented to them. This will be further set out in the practical recommendations below, but the point here is that this dissertation has illustrated that giving users 'what they want' and providing news that plays a beneficial role in society are perfectly compatible. However, for this to happen news organizations must ask themselves which 'desire'

they want to cater to. Similar to how food choices and dietary behavior are influenced by access to and physical availability of food (Larson & Story, 2009), it should be no surprise that users will consume junk news if offered to them. To stay with the food metaphor: this suggests that while news organizations may continue to bring news that provides instant gratification but little substance – and, similar to junk food, may also generate feelings of guilt or regret after consumption (McPhail, Chapman & Beagan, 2011; O'Dea, 2003) – this should not come at the expense of news that requires a bit more chewing but provides a luscious quality experience and leaves one satisfied. Put differently, the challenge is to create a user experience that is both *currently pleasurable* and *retrospectively appreciated*.

Professional relevance: user-centered journalism

The findings and conclusions of this dissertation also have professional relevance. What can news organizations take away from this research? To continue with the point raised above, first, the results offer suggestions for how to create user experiences that are both currently pleasurable and retrospectively appreciated. As chapter 4 suggested, in terms of content, people enjoy and appreciate news that is empathetic, explanatory, and constructive. (Note: although these results emerged from a current affairs TV case study, they also resonate with the findings from the other studies). An *empathetic approach* refers to enabling news users to relate to the subjects in the news (i.e. to understand what it feels like to be in their situation), but also to journalists' attitude toward these subjects. Somewhat surprisingly, informants most appreciated news that approached politicians and other powerful individuals critically but still as real people, providing them the opportunity to explain underlying considerations for their decisions and positions. An *explanatory approach* ultimately refers to helping users understand the significance of a topic: What does it mean and why does it matter? For most users who are not news junkies following the news all day, it can be challenging to keep up with and make sense of the barrage of news that comes their way on a daily basis. As the consideration "disjointed news fact" (chapter 4) illustrates, users have little incentive to click on a headline about the latest development regarding Russia's annexation of Crimea if they do understand the conflict in the first place. Likewise, they cannot care about the Elections to the European Parliament if they do not know what this parliament does and how it affects their everyday life. Explaining the basics of such topics affords users an entry point to caring about these topics. This does not mean that journalists have to start at zero in every news item, but there is no reason why online news about a complex topic such as Dutch provincial politics cannot link to an explainer of the basics of this system. Finally, a *constructive approach* here refers to news that offers a possible way

forward and/or identifies barriers to a potential solution (cf. Gyldensted, 2015; McIntyre & Gyldensted, 2017). To clarify, this does not mean that users expect journalists to solve complex problems; rather, they want to understand why they keep hearing about that same problem in their municipality over and over, or if those opposition parties that seem to be against everything themselves have any viable alternatives to offer.

However, it would be naïve to think that providing the right content would automatically result in more users or more subscribers. Content and storytelling choices are no panacea (Groot Kormelink & Costera Meijer, 2015). At least as important as offering the right content is understanding the audience's patterns of news use and daily routines: availability and opportunity must be aligned. For instance, chapter 6 showed that news content can perfectly match a user's interests and yet not be read due to time issues or saturation. While more research is needed to suggest concrete strategies to get into users' daily routines, news organizations would do well to experiment with pushing different content at different times. They might experiment with personalized pushing (e.g. newsletters, push notifications about relevant content) and try to establish which moments and which types of content work for different users. To illustrate, the informant that had become "news tired" when she finally got to the supplements of her e-paper she was actually most interested in, would ideally be pushed this content first thing on Saturday morning.

Editorial analytics are essential here. Although this dissertation assessed 'clicks' and 'time spent' critically, metrics are most valuable for news organizations to understand their users. However, there is no one-size-fit-all approach to metrics: the right (set of) metrics for a news organization must be based on their specific goals (Cherubini & Nielsen, 2016). For news organizations aiming to deliver news that is both currently enjoyable and retrospective appreciated and offer news in a way that fits their users' practices, various metrics can be used to assess their performance. Clicks can help establish which (kinds of) headlines attract users to quality content, and 'engaged time' and 'scroll depth' can help gauge if stories intended to be read fully were successful and if not where readers dropped out. Click-through rates on social media can help establish what kind of content is worth interrupting one's flow of scrolling (chapter 6), and 'session length' and 'return visits' can help determine which practices visitors engage in (e.g. "reading" versus "checking" (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015). Conversation rates for free trials or subscriptions can help determine what kind of content is (literally) most valuable to users: what is worth signing up or paying for?

Usability is also essential. In addition to having smoothly working and intuitive designs, news organizations could help news users master their devices and interfaces. As chapter 6 revealed, one barrier to adopting news into one's routine is missing the practical skills to handle and navigate devices and platforms efficiently, and not wanting

to put effort into learning them. A practical solution is to make an accessible how-to-guide for new users or subscribers. Examples include a manual explaining the basic set-up of the newspaper so that the subscriber knows where to find relevant and interesting content, or in-app 'directions' for first-time users (e.g. "double-click to open the article in print version"; "do [so and so] to save this article for later"). News organizations may also keep in mind that different users engage in different practices, such as "checking", "reading" and "scanning" (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015). A user-friendly approach that takes these practices into account does not have to be money or time-consuming. A simple example is Dutch newspaper *Trouw*, which summarizes its cover story in three short, clear sentences, effectively serving both users who "read" and those who "scan".

Regarding explicit personalization, chapter 3 shows that this should be as effortless as possible for users. Although implicit (algorithmic) personalization was not researched in this dissertation, it must be kept in mind that people consume news for more than informational or entertainment reason: they also consume news – even if it is just to glance at a headline – to have a shared frame of reference with other people. From a user perspective, then, a mix of general content and algorithmically personalized content would likely be ideal.

Limitations

In addition to the limitations of the methodological approaches discussed in Chapter 2, it is worth reflecting on a few specific points regarding this dissertation. First, a valid criticism is that although one of the points of departure of this dissertation was a concern regarding the notion of the agency, the think-aloud protocol seems to conceive of people as exactly that: active, deliberate users aware of their own considerations for clicking or not clicking. While this is a fair critique, the goal was to capture people's 'stream of consciousness', their immediate thoughts and feelings. The informants were not conceived of as agents fully aware of their environment and capable of computing different options before coming to a rational decision, but rather as subjective beings navigating an information environment in real time. The aim was to capture the experience of browsing news from their own perspective, which is why their considerations for (not) clicking were labelled explicitly in their own terms.

A related note is that in chapter 4 a distinction was made between cognitive and affective considerations for clicking, despite the argument in this conclusion that such dimensions only gain significance in their interconnection with each other. A defense is that these categories were not the starting point but the endpoint of research. Using the grounded theory approach, these categories appeared – inductively – to be the

best 'fit' for making sense of people's considerations for clicking: they express the distinction between instantaneous thoughts (cognitive) and gut feelings (affective). In other words, this distinction has *heuristic* value and should not be interpreted as suggesting a separation between cognition and affect (although this debate is beyond the scope of this dissertation).

In chapter 3, informants built their ideal news sites, which had a striking similarity: they all prominently featured columns with the latest headlines (chronologically ordered) and with the most important news (as highlighted by the news organization). A possible criticism of this method is that since this project was done in collaboration with NOS Nieuws, cards featuring elements from their website were dominant (although they were supplemented with functionalities from other websites). One could therefore question whether informants' ideal news sites were constrained by the available (NOS) cards, i.e. whether they merely recreated NOS.nl. However, defenses against this are that 1) not all informants were familiar with NOS.nl; 2) the ones that did use NOS.nl criticized it for (at the time) being highly unorganized and unclear; and 3) their 'clean' ideal news sites did not resemble NOS.nl. A weightier concern is whether the ideal news sites were a reflection of the lay-out of most news sites (which usually prominently feature the highlights and the latest headlines), including most popular Dutch news site Nu.nl. This is a fair question that cannot be answered based on the data collected within this dissertation (see Webster, 2014, for a discussion about whether user preferences are preexistent or cultivated by media, p. 110-112). What can be emphasized is that the informants' considerations were key in interpreting their ideal news sites: they were able to explain *why* they wanted their ideal news site to look like this, namely because they wanted to be brought up-to-date about the latest and most important news as quickly as possible.

The results in chapter 3 must also be revisited in light of new findings regarding people's preferences for personalization. Research from the Reuters Institute for the Study of Journalism (Oxford) found that in 19 out of 26 countries surveyed, respondents said that having news automatically selected based on their past consumption was a better option for getting news than having it selected for them by journalists and editors (Nielsen, 2016b; Thurman et al., 2018). How does this square with our findings that people prefer journalistic selection over personalized news? First, although the differences were small, Dutch respondents still preferred journalistic curation (Thurman et al., 2018). Second, our study focused on *explicit* personalization (i.e. users actively personalize their news) rather than algorithmic selection. Third, it is likely that between 2013 and 2016 people grew more accustomed to personalization due to exposure to such services as YouTube, Spotify and Netflix. Finally, the difference in appreciation of journalistic curation might partially be explained by the different questions asked. In

our study, journalistic curation was presented as the status quo. For instance, in the news site building exercise, news "highlights" were depicted visually on a card (i.e. the card contained an example of highlighted news on an actual news site), rather than explicitly presented as news marked as most important by journalists. In addition, our (non-representative) survey questions regarding journalistic curation did not reference human actors (e.g., "I find it important that *the news site* clearly indicates which news is the most important"). The Reuters study, on the other hand, did refer to individual journalists ("Having stories selected for me by editors and journalists is a good way to get news"), and presented journalistic curation as one among three equivalent options ("Automatically based on what I've read before", "Judgement of editors or journalists", and "Automatically based on what my friends have consumed") (Newman et al., 2016: 12). It could therefore be argued that journalists' role in selecting news was underemphasized in our study and overemphasized in the Reuters study.

Although this dissertation has shown the value of taking people's experience of news use as point of departure, this approach – of course – also has limitations. The most notable one is that by focusing on people's experiences, one of the core functions of journalism is partly overlooked: to inform people. Most notably, the question of whether users understood and remembered news was not addressed. Clearly, this is a limitation: People may appreciate an explanatory approach, but does this actually enhance their understanding? They may experience the practice of checking as valuable and informative, but does it increase their actual knowledge of news? These are important questions that warrant further research. What this dissertation did show was how the situatedness of news use must be taken into account when studying comprehension and retention of news. News is more than a text: it is situated on a technology that has to be handled and navigated, used in a distinct place and time, involving surrounding practices and including different feelings. As concluded in chapter 6, more non-news-centric, in-situ approach is needed to understand how people perceive and process news in real life.

Finally, a word on the grounded theory method employed in this dissertation. In this approach, concepts and categories are described as "emerging" from the data (Corbin & Strauss, 1990). This is a useful way of emphasizing that concepts and categories are the *result* of the research process rather than the starting point. However, sometimes we can only see things if we have words or concepts for it. In practice, therefore, (new) literature was searched and consulted throughout the research process to help make sense of the data. The notion of prism is helpful here (Pink & Leder Mackley, 2013). Whereas a lens *focuses* light on a particular dimension, a prism instead turns a ray of light into a spectrum of colors, making visible *an array* of dimensions inherent but hitherto invisible. Rather than superimposing a priori decided concepts, analytical prisms can be

seen as "theoretical constructs that have been developed to understand things that are *already happening*", offering "an abstract route to comprehending complex processes" (Pink, 2012: 19). The challenge then becomes to keep revisiting the data as openly as possible, so that the concepts and categories can still "emerge" from the data.

Future directions

In the sections above, some suggestions were already made for future research. As noted, a main challenge is to explore how people can be enabled to use news that their ideal selves want to use. A first step is to systematically explore whether empathetic, explanatory and constructive approaches to news translate into increased use or subscriptions. However, just providing the right content will likely not do the trick; news also needs to fit into people's everyday routines. A second avenue for research is therefore habit formation: how do people adopt (new forms of) news into their everyday routine, and what are the barriers and possibilities? Methodologically, one way to go about this is to follow people who have recently subscribed to a news title – that they actually want to use – and to capture how, when, and why they do or do not manage to use it. A related question is how taste or preferences for news develop (see Webster, 2014). In particular, it would be interesting to explore how exposure impacts people's preferences for content and form and by extension how these preferences can be nudged or changed. For instance, two groups could be exposed to different versions of a news site over a longer period of time and then be surveyed about their preferences.

Another challenge is to (further) develop metrics that are more civic-oriented and measure the democratic impact of news. This is especially urgent for public service media, whose primary task in the Netherlands is to inform and educate the public (Mediawet 2008) and whose performance thus should be also judged on the basis of these criteria. Research shows that while journalists do wish to measure their impact in terms of "changes in public policy, public opinion/discourse, individual/community action, and awareness/understanding", they lack the tools to do so and instead rely on more readily available metrics such as social media traction and web traffic (Powers, 2018: 467). Although metrics of reach and engagement can help media determine whether they fulfil their duty to reach a broad audience, too much of a focus on these numbers incentivizes traffic- and traction-chasing. The latter in particular deserves more attention. If (public) news organizations judge their performance based on social media traction such as comments, this encourages not only subjective status messages (Welbers & Opgenhaffen, 2018), but also intentionally sensational or polarizing ones, since controversial topics attract more (uncivil) comments (Ksiazek, 2018; Ziegele et al., 2018). This is undesirable, especially for public news organizations. Various stakeholders

(scholars, journalists, policymakers) should work together to formulate how civic-oriented impact might be defined and how it can be measured.

Finally, capturing people's experiences systematically could be a valuable way of creating a historical record of changing news use (cf. Livingstone, 2003; Jensen, 1993). If only numbers like engagement metrics, ratings and circulation figures survive, this will leave behind a limited, superficial account of people's news use. By recording people's news use from an emic perspective, we could 'archive' how their mundane everyday news experiences change over time. For instance, a representative panel of news users could be followed over the course of several years (or even decades), interviewed yearly to document (changes in) their news use. Such an ambitious project would allow us to document how changes in the media landscape impacted people's everyday news use.

APPENDICES

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English summary

This dissertation explores how people's experiences of news use can be captured and how these experiences can help us to make sense of everyday news use. Although news users have become increasingly central to scholarly discussions about journalism, we still have a comparatively limited understanding of news use from an emic perspective (Pike, 1967): from the perspective of news users themselves. First, research tends to focus on news professionals' ideas about and conceptions of audiences instead of on audiences themselves. Second, research is dominated by approaches that measure and quantify news use rather than seek to understand (changing) news use from users' own vantage point. Third, increasingly, data are collected by and thus in and on the news industry's terms, in ways (i.e., big data) which tend to be framed as more "data-driven" and (thus) "scientific" (see Napoli, 2011), risking replacement of efforts to understand news users from their own perspective.

A second point of departure for this dissertation is scholars' conception of audiences, which often center around the idea of agency and/or activity. Though valuable for grasping changing news use in a fast-changing media landscape, this notion of the more or less active user is prone to overlook three things: First, a focus on what news users do or do not do risks essentializing them based on a singular (e.g. page views, time spent) or limited (e.g. types of media used) dimension of their news practices. Second, the idea of active users making deliberate and rational choices is not easily compatible with researching – respectively – subconscious dimensions of people's news use (e.g., automatic, habitual behavior) and how their practices and experiences are shaped by (everyday) structures beyond their control. Third, relatedly, the notion of active agents tends to lead to a focus on cognitive dimensions of news use (selection, meaning-making, production) at the cost of other experiential dimensions, such as affective and sensory ones. This dissertation therefore implements three shifts, which could potentially reveal a different, more nuanced picture of everyday news use:

1 From assumptions about news users to understanding news users in and on their own terms;
2 From categorizing and quantifying what news users do to understanding what it is like to (not) use news;
3 From a focus on cognition to including other (experiential) dimensions of news use.

Capturing the experience of everyday news use requires a carefully designed methodological set-up. The methods used in this dissertation are described, illustrated and evaluated in **Chapter 2.** This chapter seeks to go beyond justifying qualitative methods vis-à-vis quantitative methods and – in particular – to be more reflective and

critical regarding the limitations and possibilities of the qualitative interview. It makes the case for taking experience as point of departure for studying news use, explicating this notion by drawing from four theoretical conceptions of experience: the distinction between undergoing (*erleben*) and having undergone (*erlebnis*) an experience; the temporal orientation toward one's experience (real-time, retrospective); various modes of experience (sensation, perception, conception); and different dimensions of people's experience (e.g., cognitive, emotional, sensory). Subsequently, the chapter critically reflects upon three interview-based methods that center around users' experience of news use – the think-aloud protocol, watching and discussing news, and the two-sided video-ethnography – by discussing their theoretical, methodological and epistemological implications. A common thread emerging from the different user studies is that people require support to be able to access and communicate their experiences of news use. The methods discussed proved successful at doing so, respectively by having informants comment on what they saw right in front of them (see), by giving them the tools and the vocabulary to reflect on a prior experience (think), and by bringing them in touch with their sensations of using news (feel).

Chapter 3 explores the extent to which news users desire to tailor news to their personal preferences and practices. The chapter triangulates the results of in-depth user interviews (N=24), a user survey (N = 270), production interviews with (chief) editors and policy makers (N=5), and an inventory of new "news products" on mobile and social media. Overall, the results suggest that users have limited interest in tailor-making their news: participants were not willing to put time and effort into personalization, they did not want to miss potentially relevant news (even if it concerned a topic or genre they did not usually care for), and they wanted the news organization to select relevant and topical news *for* them. What they desired in particular is control, which means that news should be 1) readily and separately available, 2) easy to pass or ignore at all times, 3) presented in a clear (and clean) manner, and (4) selected and presented on the basis of relevance and topicality. In short, they want the option to choose without having to choose.

Chapter 4 problematizes the relationship between clicks and audience interests. Clicking patterns are often seen as evidence that news users are mostly interested in junk news, leading to concerns about the state of journalism and the implications for society. Using the think-aloud protocol, this chapter asked and observed how 56 users actually browse news and what clicking and not clicking mean to them. This generated thirty distinct considerations for (not) clicking, classified into three categories: cognitive, affective and pragmatic. The results suggest, first, that interest is too crude a term to account for the variety of people's considerations for (not) clicking. Second, even if one aims to roughly estimate people's news interests, clicks are a flawed instrument because

a lack of clicking does not equal a lack of interest in news. For instance, participants often gathered sufficient information from news headlines to get a sense of what the news was about, especially if it concerned an on-going news event. Third, browsing patterns (including clicking) might give a more accurate picture of users' interests, and taking these patterns seriously could help bridge the gap between what people (supposedly) need as citizens and what they actually consume. For instance, news sites or news apps might be designed in such a way that they facilitate a broader range of user practices (from "checking" and "scanning" to "reading") (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015), in effect catering to the diverse needs of different users at different times. Finally, the chapter argues that all metrics should be critically assessed from a user perspective rather than taken at face value.

Chapter 5 explores how political information can be told in such a way that news users experience it as captivating. More specifically, it seeks to bridge the gap between what attracts and satisfies viewers, by developing bottom–up, user-defined, quality criteria for current affairs TV. Items from two Dutch current affairs shows (EenVandaag and Buitenhof) were watched and discussed immediately afterward with 54 viewers. The study found that informants were able to distinguish between two viewing experiences: "enjoyment" and "appreciation" (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014; Oliver & Bartsch, 2010). Enjoyment is characterized by pleasure in the sense of fun and amusement and is associated with a lean-back viewing practice in which the news often functions as a soundtrack to other activities (e.g., cooking). Appreciation, on the other hand, is associated with concentrated, lean-forward viewing and is characterized by a willingness to invest time in exchange for gaining insight and learning new perspectives (an aha-experience). While certainly enjoying sensational news items, a key finding is that informants greatly appreciated feeling enabled by journalism – through empathetic, explanatory and constructive approaches – to better understand how politics work and impact their daily life and society at large. This suggests that what viewers want from political journalism might differ from what journalists produce yet is perfectly compatible with their democratic remit.

Chapter 6 seeks to capture material and sensory dimensions of everyday news use that usually remain unexplored. To that end a two-sided-ethnography was developed, filming people while they use news, allowing both researchers and participants to look in and reflect on their news use. Tapping into news users' embodied, tacit knowledge, the study found that the materiality of devices and platforms and the ways users physically handle and navigate them impact how they experience and engage with news, in ways they themselves had not realized. The study also deepened our understanding of previously found news user practices (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015), and identified the distinct practice scrolling, which is characterized by an embodied urge

to keep up the movement of the hand, even when the user finds content appealing. Finally, the chapter shows how people actively 'make' place and time through their news practices, using coping strategies that mediate between the comfortability of ritual news use and the disruptiveness of news content. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the theoretical, methodological, and epistemological implications of the study, which include a call for more in-situ, real-time, and non-news-centric approaches to studying everyday news use.

Chapter 7 explores what spending time means from a user perspective. It takes as point of departure three tendencies within journalism and journalism studies: measuring news consumption in terms of how much time people spend on it, using "time spent" to make inferences about news users' interests or preferences, and seeing more time spent on news use as inherently or automatically desirable. The chapter draws from the data generated in the audience studies described in chapters 4, 5 and 6. It reveals three complexities regarding time spent in relation to news use. Overall, the study finds that time spent does not necessarily measure interest in, attention to or engagement with news. First, time spent does not reflect the quality of attention being paid. Second, there is no linear relationship between time spent and interest or engagement. More time spent on news use can be the result of little interest or engagement, and vice versa. Experienced users engage in quick news practices because they are practiced and skillful at using news: they know how to handle and navigate their devices, they can efficiently scan digital environments for new and relevant information, and they are aware of news conventions or title-specific tendencies telling them which parts of news they could skip. Third, different news devices, platforms and genres coincide with different temporal experiences of news. For instance, while the print newspaper is often experienced as a moment of relaxation, on digital news media speed and efficiency appear to be valued more, making the experience of time become intensified. This suggests that while time spent is certainly useful to measure how people divide the finite resource that is their attention, we must be mindful of what we can infer from differences between platforms in terms of time spent.

Finally, **chapter 8** reflects on the **conclusions** that can be drawn from the research in this dissertation. **First**, it has nuanced dominant assumptions about the interests of news users. While taken at face value, metrics such as clicks and time spent appear to confirm long-held suspicions about users' preferences for news (i.e., junk news), this dissertation has shown that their interests are not fully reflected by metrics. For instance, clicks are a problematic measure of people's interest in news because they overemphasize headlines that 'demand' a click (i.e. that *evoke* curiosity more than reflect a pre-existing interest) and miss browsing practices that do not require a click but that users do experience as valuable and informative (chapter 4). Likewise, while time spent

can be an indicator of interest or engagement, it can also point to a lack thereof or be a sign of users' skills and practice (chapter 7). **Second**, relatedly, this dissertation nuances the narrative of "the rationalization of audience understanding" (Napoli, 2011) which suggests that more data necessarily get one closer to a better or more 'objective' understanding of news audiences. While metrics (and tracking data) have certainly added an indispensable – and previously unattainable – perspective to understanding news audiences, this dissertation has shown that capturing people's *experiences* of news use allows for a critical assessment of the strengths and limitations of metrics, and helps avoid essentializing news users based on an isolated dimension of their news use.

Third, this dissertation captured experiences and practices of news use that do not neatly fit within established categories, generating nuances and new insights that further our understanding of everyday news use. For instance, "measured avoidance", which refers to people's careful measuring of and slaloming around (negative) content to protect their frame of mind, illustrates that the decision to (not) consume (particular) news is made on a much more specific level that can be captured in the categories of news-seeking and news avoidance. Likewise, chapter 4 found thirty considerations for clicking or not clicking on news that were generated bottom-up, adding further detail to known phenomena (e.g., the difference between 'bemusement' and 'bullshit' as reactions to clickbait headlines) as well as yielding original considerations such as "gleeful annoyance" which is a mix of positive (delight) and negative (rage) affect. A **fourth** conclusion is that experience is a helpful starting point for making sense of news use because it requires a more holistic approach that can generate an understanding of news use unattainable when looking at singular or separate dimensions. Indeed, cognitive, affective, sensory and other dimensions of news use have significance in their *interconnectedness*. This is illustrated by the practice of "scrolling", characterized by an incessant urge to keep moving down one's Facebook feed, even if one is interested in the content: it includes cognitive (perceiving the content), affective (being emotionally impacted by the content; feeling an embodied urge to move on) and sensory (moving one's finger on the mouse or keyboard) dimensions. **Fifth**, the notion of experience proved useful for capturing how using news involves embodied knowledge and practical skills that need to be acquired, such as learning how to efficiently handle and navigate a technology or platform. Such skills of news use have been underappreciated in journalism studies. Whereas news literacy has focused mostly on being a "good citizen" through critical thinking and comprehension of news (production) processes, it might also include teaching people how to be a *proficient user*.

To conclude, the results of this dissertation indicate that – contrary to popular belief, and in line with Costera Meijer's (2013) suggestion – listening to news users can help *increase* rather than lower the quality of journalism, albeit quality from a user

perspective that is not necessarily aligned with conventional journalism. While people certainly do consume and enjoy 'junk' news or sensational news when offered to them, they also have a desire for 'public affairs' news. Specifically, the informants in this dissertation say they also want to be (en)able(d) to *understand* news events better: What does it mean and why does it matter? What is it like to be in such a situation? What is a possible way forward and what are barriers to a potential solution? This suggests that while news organizations may continue to bring news that provides instant gratification but little substance (and, similar to junk food, possibly also generates feelings of guilt or regret after consumption), this should not come at the expense of news that requires a bit more chewing but provides a luscious, quality experience and leaves one satisfied. In other words: news that creates a user experience that is both *currently pleasurable* and *retrospectively appreciated*.

Nederlandse samenvatting

Dit proefschrift onderzoekt hoe de ervaringen van nieuwsgebruikers gevat kunnen worden en hoe die ervaringen ons kunnen helpen alledaags nieuwsgebruik beter te begrijpen. Hoewel nieuwsgebruikers een steeds voornamere rol spelen in wetenschappelijke discussies over journalistiek, blijft er relatief weinig bekend over nieuwsgebruik vanuit een zogenaamd *emic perspective* (Pike, 1967): een perspectief van binnenuit. Ten eerste richt wetenschappelijk onderzoek zich vaak op de ideeën die journalisten over hun publiek hebben in plaats van op nieuwsgebruikers zelf. Ten tweede wordt wetenschappelijk onderzoek gedomineerd door benaderingen die nieuwsgebruik meten en kwantificeren in plaats van proberen te begrijpen vanuit het perspectief van de gebruikers zelf. Ten derde worden data steeds vaker verzameld door en dus op de voorwaarden van de nieuwsindustrie. De grootschalige dataverzameling (big data) die dit betreft wordt vaak gezien als wetenschappelijker (zie Napoli, 2011), wat ten koste kan gaan van kleinschaligere, arbeidsintensieve initiatieven om nieuwsgebruikers vanuit hun eigen perspectief te begrijpen.

Een tweede vertrekpunt van dit proefschrift is de manier waarop nieuwsgebruikers vaak worden geconceptualiseerd: in termen van *agency* en/of activiteit. Hoewel het idee van de min of meer actieve gebruikers waardevol is om vast te stellen hoe nieuwsgebruik verandert in een snel veranderend medialandschap, worden met deze notie drie zaken bijna vanzelfsprekend over het hoofd gezien. Allereerst brengt een focus op wat gebruikers *doen* het risico met zich mee hen te essentialiseren op basis van één of enkele dimensies van hun activiteiten, zoals hun klikgedrag of het type media dat ze gebruiken. Ten tweede is het idee van actieve gebruikers die bewuste en rationele keuzes maken niet eenvoudig te rijmen met onderzoek naar onbewuste dimensies van nieuwsgebruik (zoals automatisch of gewoontegedrag) en hoe nieuwsgebruik (mede) wordt gevormd door alledaagse structuren. Tot slot leidt de notie van actieve gebruikers doorgaans tot aandacht voor cognitieve dimensies van nieuwsgebruik (selectie, interpretatie, productie) ten koste van andere dimensies, zoals affectieve en zintuigelijke. Dit proefschrift implementeert daarom de volgende drie verschuivingen die potentieel een genuanceerder, gelaagder beeld opleveren van alledaags nieuwsgebruik:

1 Van aannames over gebruikers naar gebruikers op hun eigen voorwaarden begrijpen;
2 Van het categoriseren en kwantificeren van nieuwsgebruik naar het begrijpen van hoe het is om nieuws te gebruiken;
3 Van een focus op cognitie naar het opzoeken van en openstaan voor andere dimensies van nieuwsgebruik.

Het vangen van de ervaring van alledaags nieuwsgebruik vereist een zorgvuldig samengesteld methodologisch design. De methoden gebruikt in dit proefschrift

worden beschreven, geïllustreerd en geëvalueerd in **hoofdstuk twee**. Dit hoofdstuk beoogt verder te gaan dan kwalitatieve methoden te verdedigen ten opzichte van kwantitatieve methoden en reflecteert in het bijzonder kritisch op de mogelijkheden en de beperkingen van het kwalitatieve interview. Bepleit wordt om ervaring als vertrekpunt te nemen voor het onderzoeken van nieuwsgebruik. Deze notie wordt uiteengezet aan de hand van vier theoretische concepties van ervaring: het onderscheid tussen ervaren (*erleben*) en ervaring (*erlebnis*); de tijdsoriëntatie die daarbij centraal staat (real-time versus retrospectief); de verschillende modi van ervaring (sensatie, perceptie, conceptie); en de verschillende dimensies van ervaring (zoals cognitie, emotie, zintuiglijkheid, etc.). Het hoofdstuk bespreekt vervolgens de theoretische, methodologische en epistemologische implicaties van drie methoden: de hardopdenkmethode, het kijken en bespreken van nieuws, en de tweezijdige video-etnografie. Rode draad is dat mensen ondersteuning nodig blijken te hebben om 'toegang' te krijgen tot hun eigen ervaringen van nieuws en deze te communiceren. De drie methoden slagen hierin door informanten te laten becommentariëren wat ze voor zich zien, hen de hulpmiddelen en het vocabulaire aan te reiken om te reflecteren op een eerdere ervaring, en hen in aanraking te brengen met hun gevoel tijdens nieuwsgebruik.

Hoofdstuk 3 onderzoekt in hoeverre nieuwsgebruikers de behoefte hebben om nieuws op maat te maken, oftewel aan te passen aan hun eigen voorkeuren en praktijken. Het hoofdstuk trianguleert de resultaten van diepte-interviews met nieuwsgebruikers (N=24), een enquête (N=270) onder gebruikers, diepte-interviews (N=5) met nieuwsprofessionals van NOS Nieuws en een inventaris van de mogelijkheden die NOS Nieuws gebruikers biedt om nieuws op maat te maken. De resultaten suggereren dat gebruikers beperkte interesse hebben in expliciete personalisatie (i.e., het zelf op maat maken van hun nieuws): ze hebben er geen tijd en moeite voor over, ze willen potentieel belangrijk nieuws niet missen (zelfs als het een onderwerp of genre betreft waar ze doorgaans geen interesse in hebben), en ze willen dat de nieuwsorganisatie *voor* hen selecteert welk nieuws belangrijk en recent is. Bovenal willen ze controle, wat betekent dat nieuws 1) direct en gemakkelijk raadpleegbaar is; 2) te allen tijde eenvoudig is over te slaan of te negeren; 3) overzichtelijk gepresenteerd wordt; en 4) geselecteerd en gepresenteerd wordt op basis van belangrijkheid en actualiteit. Kort samengevat willen ze de optie om te kiezen zonder te hoeven kiezen.

Hoofdstuk 4 problematiseert de relatie tussen kliks en de interesses van nieuwsgebruikers. Klikpatronen worden vaak gezien als bewijs dat gebruikers vooral geïnteresseerd zijn in junknieuws, wat leidt tot zorgen over de gezondheid van de journalistiek en de bijbehorende implicaties voor onze democratische samenleving. Via de hardopdenkmethode werd van 56 gebruikers vastgesteld hoe zij (digitaal) nieuws gebruiken en wat (al dan niet) klikken voor hen betekent. Dit leverde dertig

verschillende overwegingen op om (niet) te klikken, geclassificeerd in drie categorieën: cognitief, affectief en pragmatisch. Deze resultaten suggereren, ten eerste, dat interesse een te grove term is om de variëteit aan klikoverwegingen te vatten. Ten tweede, zelfs als het doel is een ruwe inschatting te krijgen van de interesses van gebruikers, zijn kliks een problematisch instrument omdat het uitblijven van een klik niet gelijk staat aan een gebrek aan interesse. Informanten haalden bijvoorbeeld geregeld voldoende informatie uit een headline om een indruk te krijgen van het nieuws. Ten derde geven browsepatronen (inclusief klikgedrag) mogelijk een accurater beeld van de interesses van gebruikers. Het serieus nemen van deze browsepatronen zou kunnen helpen de kloof te overbruggen tussen wat nieuwsgebruikers nodig (zouden) hebben als burgers en wat zij daadwerkelijk consumeren. Zo zouden nieuwssites en -apps zo kunnen worden ontworpen dat ze een breder scala aan nieuwsgebruikspatronen (van "checking" tot "scanning" tot "lezen") (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015) faciliteren om tegemoet te komen aan de diverse behoeften van verschillende gebruikers op verschillende momenten.

Hoofdstuk 5 onderzoekt hoe politieke informatie zo kan worden gebracht dat nieuwsgebruikers het als *boeiend* ervaren. In het bijzonder wordt geprobeerd het gat te dichten tussen wat kijkers aantrekt en wat hen voldoening geeft door *bottom-up* – oftewel door gebruikers definieerde – kwaliteitscriteria voor (politiek) nieuws te ontwikkelen. In interviews met kijkers (N=54) werden fragmenten van twee actualiteitenrubrieken (EenVandaag en Buitenhof) bekeken en meteen daarna besproken. Zij bleken onderscheid te (kunnen) maken tussen twee kijkervaringen: *enjoyment* (vermaak) en *appreciation* (waardering) (Bartsch & Schneider, 2014; Oliver & Bartsch, 2010). Enjoyment wordt gekenmerkt door genot in de zin van plezier en wordt geassocieerd met een zogenaamde *lean-back* ervaring waarbij het kijken van nieuws vaak als achtergrond dient voor andere dagelijkse praktijken zoals koken. Appreciation, daarentegen, wordt geassocieerd met een geconcentreerde, *lean-forward* ervaring en wordt gekenmerkt door een bereidheid tijd en moeite te investeren in ruil voor het opdoen van nieuwe inzichten en het leren van nieuwe perspectieven (een *aha-erlebnis*). Hoewel de informanten sensationeel nieuws zeker vermakelijk vinden, is een belangrijke constatering dat zij het meest geboeid waren als ze in staat werden gesteld te begrijpen hoe politiek werkt en welke impact het heeft op hun dagelijks leven. Dit suggereert dat wat deze nieuwsgebruikers vragen van politieke journalistiek wellicht verschilt van wat journalisten doorgaans produceren maar desalniettemin verenigbaar is met hun democratische taak.

Hoofdstuk 6 probeert materiële en zintuigelijke dimensies van nieuwsgebruik te vangen die vaak onderbelicht blijven. Daartoe is een tweezijdige video-etnografie ontwikkeld waarbij informanten eerst werden gefilmd terwijl ze nieuws gebruikten en

deze video's vervolgens met hen werden terugkeken en besproken. Dit gaf zowel de onderzoeker als de informant een inkijk in hun nieuwsgebruik en maakte het onder andere mogelijk de *embodied knowledge* (oftewel de kennis in hun lichaam) van de informanten aan te boren. Belangrijkste resultaat is dat de materialiteit van apparaten en platforms en de manieren waarop gebruikers deze besturen en navigeren impact heeft op hoe zij nieuws gebruiken en ervaren, vaak op manieren waarvan zij zich zelf niet bewust waren. Het onderzoek verdiept tevens ons begrip van eerder gevonden nieuwsgebruikerspraktijken (Costera Meijer & Groot Kormelink, 2015) en onderscheidt daarnaast de unieke praktijk 'scrollen', gekenmerkt door een in het lichaam gevoelde neiging om de vinger te blijven bewegen, zelfs als de gebruiker de inhoud die hij of zij ziet interessant vindt. Tot slot laat het hoofdstuk zien hoe mensen actief plaats en tijd 'maken' via hun nieuwspraktijken, gebruikmakend van coping-strategieën die mediëren tussen het comfort dat ritueel nieuwsgebruik biedt en de verstorende werking van (negatieve) nieuwsinhoud. Het hoofdstuk sluit af met een reflectie op de theoretische, methodologische en epistemologische implicaties van het onderzoek, eindigend met een oproep tot meer *in-situ*, *real-time* en *non-news-centric* onderzoek.

Hoofdstuk 7 onderzoekt wat tijd besteden aan nieuws betekent vanuit een gebruikersperspectief. Drie neigingen binnen de journalistiek(wetenschap) vormden het vertrekpunt: het meten van nieuws aan de hand van hoeveel tijd mensen eraan besteden, *time spent* gebruiken als graadmeter voor de interesses en voorkeuren van het publiek, en het zien van meer tijd besteden aan nieuws als inherent wenselijk. Het hoofdstuk maakt gebruik van de data verzameld in hoofdstukken 4, 5 en 6. Het legt drie ingewikkeldheden bloot met betrekking tot *time spent* en nieuwsgebruik die gezamenlijk suggereren dat *time spent* niet per definitie interesse in, aandacht voor of engagement met nieuws meet. Ten eerste vangt *time spent* niet de kwaliteit van de aandacht die aan nieuws wordt besteed. Ten tweede is er geen lineaire relatie tussen *time spent* en interesse of engagement. Meer tijd besteed aan nieuws kan namelijk ook het resultaat zijn van weinig interesse of engagement, of andersom. Opvallende bevinding hierbij is dat ervaren nieuwsgebruikers snel en kort nieuws gebruiken omdat zij geoefend en vaardig zijn: ze weten hoe ze hun apparaat optimaal kunnen besturen en navigeren, ze kunnen efficiënt de 'nieuwsomgeving' scannen op nieuwe en relevante informatie, en ze zijn bekend met nieuwsconventies en titel-specifieke neigingen die hen vertellen welke delen van berichten ze kunnen overslaan. Ten derde vallen verschillende nieuwsapparaten, -platforms en -genres samen met verschillende tijdservaringen. Zo wordt de papieren krant vaak ervaren als een moment ter ontspanning, terwijl op digitale media grotere waarde wordt gehecht aan snelheid en efficiëntie, waardoor de ervaring van tijd intensiever worden. Dit suggereert dat hoewel *time spent* zeer waardevol is om te meten hoe mensen het eindige middel dat

hun aandacht is verdelen, terughoudendheid geboden is over wat kan worden afgeleid van verschillen in de tijd die mensen aan nieuws besteden.

Hoofdstuk 8 vat de conclusies van dit proefschrift samen. **Ten eerste** nuanceert het proefschrift dominante assumpties over de interesses van nieuwsgebruikers. Hoewel metrics als kliks en *time spent* op het eerste gezicht vermoedens over de voorkeuren van gebruikers (e.g., honger naar junknieuws) lijken te bevestigen, heeft dit proefschrift laten zien dat hun interesses niet volledig worden gereflecteerd in metrics. Zo zijn kliks een problematische maatstaf voor interesse in nieuws omdat sensationele of ludieke headlines eerder een klik 'afdwingen' (i.e., ze wekken nieuwsgierigheid op in plaats van dat ze een al bestaande interesse reflecteren). Daarnaast worden browsepatronen die geen klik behoeven maar die gebruikers wel als waardevol en informatief ervaren niet meegenomen (hoofdstuk 4). *Time spent* kan een indicator zijn van interesse of engagement maar ook van het onderbreken ervan, of juist een teken van de vaardigheden en handigheden van gebruikers (hoofdstuk 7). **Ten tweede** nuanceert dit proefschrift het narratief van "the rationalization of audience understanding" (Napoli, 2011), dat suggereert dat meer data (big data) vanzelfsprekend leidt tot beter of objectiever begrip van nieuwsgebruik(ers). Hoewel metrics (en trackingdata) zeker een waardevolle – en tot voorheen onbereikbare – aanvulling zijn, laat dit proefschrift zien dat het vangen van de *ervaringen* van nieuwsgebruikers de kans biedt de beperkingen (maar ook de verdiensten) van metrics kritisch te beoordelen, en zodoende helpt voorkomen dat nieuwsgebruikers worden geëssentialiseerd op basis van een geïsoleerde dimensie van hun nieuwsgebruik.

Ten derde heeft dit proefschrift nieuwservaringen en -praktijken gevonden die niet eenvoudig binnen bestaande categorieën passen. Hiermee zijn nuances en nieuwe inzichten gevonden die ons begrip van alledaags nieuwsgebruik verrijken. Zo illustreert "measured avoidance" – wat refereert aan het zorgvuldig inschatten van en slalommen om (negatieve) content om een bepaalde gemoedstoestand te behouden of voorkomen – dat de beslissing om (bepaald) nieuws al dan niet te gebruiken (ook) op een veel specifieker niveau gebeurt dan is te vangen in de categorieën nieuws opzoeken (*news seeking*) en nieuws vermijden (*news avoidance*). Een ander voorbeeld is de reeks overwegingen die gebruikers hebben om al dan niet op nieuws te klikken: deze verrijken onze kennis van bestaande fenomenen (e.g., het verschil tussen "bemusement" (verwondering) en "bullshit" als reactie op clickbait) en leveren nieuwe concepten op als "gleeful annoyance" (lekker ergeren), een mix van positieve (genot) en negatieve (woede) emotie. Een **vierde conclusie** is dat ervaring een zinvol vertrekpunt is om nieuwsgebruik te onderzoeken, omdat het vangen ervan een holistische aanpak vereist waarmee een complexer, gelaagder begrip kan worden gegenereerd. Cognitieve, affectieve, zintuigelijke en andere dimensies van nieuwsgebruik krijgen

namelijk vooral betekenis in hun onderlinge verbondenheid. Dit wordt geïllustreerd door de praktijk "scrolling", gekenmerkt door een onophoudelijke behoefte om te blijven voortbewegen in de (Facebook) newsfeed, zelfs als de inhoud interessant wordt gevonden: dit bevat cognitieve (het waarnemen van de inhoud), affectieve (de emotionele impact van nieuws; een in het lichaam gevoelde urgentie om door te gaan) en zintuigelijke (de vinger over muis of keyboard bewegen) dimensies. **Ten vijfde** blijkt dat nieuwsgebruik zogenaamde *embodied knowledge* (kennis in het lichaam) en praktische vaardigheden vereist die vergaard moeten worden, zoals leren hoe een technologie of platform efficiënt bestuurd en genavigeerd kan worden. Dergelijke kennis en vaardigheden zijn onderbelicht binnen de journalistiekwetenschap. Waar *news literacy* (nieuwsgeletterdheid) zich vaak richt op kritisch denken en het begrijpen van nieuwsproductieprocessen en andere manieren om een 'goede burger' te zijn, zou meer aandacht kunnen worden besteed aan hoe mensen *vaardige nieuwsgebruikers* kunnen worden.

Tot slot: de resultaten van dit proefschrift hebben laten zien dat – anders dan vaak wordt aangenomen en in lijn met Costera Meijer's (2013) suggestie – het luisteren naar nieuwsgebruikers de kwaliteit van nieuws kan verhogen in plaats van verlagen. Maar: dan wel vanuit een gebruikersperspectief dat niet altijd overeenkomt met hoe journalistiek er doorgaans uitziet. Hoewel ze zeker gebruik maken van en plezier bleven aan junknieuws en sensationeel nieuws als hen dit wordt aangeboden, stellen de informanten in dit proefschrift dat ze ook in staat willen worden gesteld om nieuwsgebeurtenissen beter te *begrijpen*: Wat betekent dit nieuws en waarom doet het ertoe? Hoe is het om je in zo'n situatie of positie te bevinden? Wat is een mogelijke oplossing en waardoor wordt die belemmerd? Dit suggereert dat hoewel nieuwsorganisaties nieuws kunnen blijven aanbieden dat voor onmiddellijke bevrediging (*instant gratification*) zorgt maar verder weinig inhoud biedt (en – net als junk food – achteraf mogelijk ook leidt tot gevoelens van spijt), dat niet ten koste mag gaan van nieuws waar de gebruiker iets meer zijn of haar tanden in moet zetten maar dat (daardoor) een smakelijke kwaliteitservaring én een voldaan gevoel achteraf oplevert. Met andere woorden: nieuws dat een gebruikerservaring oplevert die zowel in het moment zelf lekker is als achteraf gewaardeerd wordt.

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Mon 1/30/2012 3:35 PM

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Is aangehechte vacature iets voor jou? Joyce en ik hopen van wel namelijk.
Zo ja, kunnen we dan misschien op woensdagmiddag overleggen?

Met vriendelijke groet,
Irene Costera Meijer
Joyce Lamerichs

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